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CHARLES STANLY.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NINFA."

Lawrence Grant

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE COUNTESS OF MULGRAVE

THIS BOOK

IS INSCRIBED BY HER AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

Ms. Longleat 22 Jan 53

CHARLES STANLY.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLES STANLY was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. James Stanly, and their idol. These fond parents, though not more apt to be of the same opinion than other married people, agreed, however, upon one point—they thought their boy the most wonderful the world had yet produced. Accordingly, they improved his natural gifts; and thus, in due course of time, Charles became as self-willed and as intractable a little vagabond as ever deserved flogging.

An affectionate disposition and good abilities were magnified into extraordinary endowments. Activity of mind, and quickness of apprehension, were extolled as proofs of genius. At three years old, when little

Charles wept over the Babes in the Wood, his mother trembled at his sensibility. At six, when he devoured fairy tales, his father marvelled at his imagination. And at sixteen, when he raved about Lord Byron, and wrote verses upon gilt-edged paper, his effusions were considered not inferior to those of the great poet—his model; at least, by the ladies whose charms he sang.

Charles went early to school, and became a favourite both with teachers and pupils. He was bold as a lion; enterprising, generous, and though occasionally passionate, in general good-tempered. He was a capital cricketer, and a first-rate boxer. In poaching and robbing orchards he stood unrivalled. He was, in short, foremost at all those sports congenial to what is called the innocence of childhood.

He got on well at his tasks, though it cannot be said that he preferred study to play. He was often idle, sometimes perverse; always eager for a frolic, especially when flavoured by prohibition. Yet, withal, he was so handsome, his ways were so winning, he was so high spirited, and at the same time so gentle,

he was so anxious to please, and so ready to oblige, that it was impossible not to like, and difficult not to spoil him. Thus, he generally managed to get his own way, either with leave or without it. Indeed, it was of little use to punish him. Chastisement seemed to do him more harm than good. It confirmed his faults, instead of correcting them. He cared not a rap for flogging, and snapped his fingers at bread and water. Solitary confinement appeared to raise his spirits. Shut him up in a dark room, and he only sang the louder. Then, next day, the whole school was kept in idleness and laughter by his capital imitations of cats, dogs, and other animals, in whose various idioms he had improved himself during his seclusion.

Charles was yet a mere child when his parents died. They left him their blessing, and little more. As this legacy was insufficient to provide him with food and education, application was made on his behalf to Lord Overdale, his father's elder brother, as his only surviving relation. The letter was returned unanswered, and, to all appearance, unread.

It seemed difficult to account for conduct so unfeeling. True, Lord Overdale and his brother had not spoken for years. Friends they never could be, for their tempers and dispositions were wholly uncongenial—the peer was stern and honourable, James good-natured and unprincipled—yet why they should be enemies, baffled conjecture. Indeed, the honourable James was one of those, who are styled no man's enemy but his own. With a sanguine temper, but an unsound judgment, he was always in high spirits, and low circumstances. “What is the use of *my* looking after money?” was his favourite saying. “The wretched pittance of a younger brother is not worth looking after. A man of rank should live like a gentleman, and spend his money like a gentleman.” Unluckily, he spent money which was not his, lived in discredit, and died in the King's Bench.

Yet, bad as was the father's conduct, it could not excuse Lord Overdale's cruel neglect of the child. This was the more extraordinary, for the peer, in all other respects, though an odd, was an upright man. Both

his public and private character were unimpeachable. During the short period that he had chosen to shine in the political world, he gained a brilliant reputation for talents, and for integrity. Even his enemies were forced to do justice to the steady rectitude of his principles. Whence came it that in this single instance he showed himself cruel and unjust? What could his brother have done to excite such deadly enmity? Many were the surmises on this mysterious affair, but the truth was never ascertained.

The orphan would have been entirely neglected, but for the kindness of Lady Ramsay, a friend of poor James Stanly's. This lady had promised the latter, upon his death-bed, that she would be a mother to his child. She kept her word; never was mother kinder. If her training was injudicious, her generosity was unbounded. If she spoilt him at home, she spared no money upon him at school. During the holidays he had dogs and horses *ad libitum*. At Eton, he had no end of pocket-money; and when, in accordance to a promise made to his father, Lady Ramsay sent him abroad, to finish his edu-

cation, she provided him with an allowance far superior to that which most people would have thought suitable to a young gentleman under his circumstances. But Lady Ramsay owned to “un grand faible pour les jolis garçons,” and, as she often told him, she was not afraid of spoiling either his temper or his heart. *Her boy* was always generous, and ready to give. True, his generosity was at her expense, and his gifts were not always well bestowed; but, as she observed, and generally in his hearing, intention is everything, and too much prudence is disgusting in the young. In short, she had a ready excuse for all his faults. She doted upon “her own boy,” and he, in return, was sincerely attached to “his old mother.”

In youth, Lady Ramsay had been very handsome, and at five-and-thirty, after ten years' marriage, she was still attractive. Her eyes, especially, were as beautiful as ever. And, indeed, the large hazel orbs did languish and sparkle most bewitchingly. Men called them expressive, women something more. Perhaps both were right. Possibly “to touch the brink of all we hate,” may

attract the former, and to attract the former does certainly repel the latter.

Both sexes agreed in blaming her marriage. It was, no doubt, an uncongenial one. In society, Sir James Ramsay seemed little better than an idiot. From infancy he had been subject to epileptic fits; these had weakened him, both in mind and body. It was pronounced indelicate—revolting, to marry such a man. The baronet's poor relations, and Lady Ramsay's unmarried female friends, were especially loud in their virtuous indignation.

That there might be extenuating circumstances, they scorned to admit. No circumstances, they stoutly maintained, should have compelled *them* to such degradation. Rather than submit to it, they would have worked for their bread. It may be doubted whether the alternative was ever offered them.

At the time Lady Ramsay married, her situation was one of the most distressing, that can be imagined. Mr. Tyrrell, her father, an opulent merchant, had, by some sudden reverse of fortune, been reduced to beggary. He blew out his brains, by way of mending

matters, and left a widow and three children unprovided for. Had Lady Ramsay not married, they must all have starved. Was her decision so very blameable?

Blamed, however, it was, and wondered at also. How could the offer have been made? The baronet could not write. He could not speak three consecutive words. Was ever proposal couched in less? It was clear that the lady had made the advances, and that the affair was a shameful take in.

However dubious the proposal, the marriage was a certainty. The female friends stared, and the poor relations stormed. They shook their heads ominously, feared that Miss Tyrrell had been a sad flirt, and hoped that Lady Ramsay might not prove something worse. Lady Ramsay cared little for their fears, or their hopes either. She was now mistress of Sir James's fortune. It was a splendid fortune, and the world smiled upon its fair dispenser; the fair dispenser smiled in return, and no house was so agreeable as hers—excepting, indeed, to the poor relations and female friends. But they were allowed, at their leisure, to admire the outside of it.

They comforted themselves by predicting neglect and ill usage to poor Sir James. These charitable prognostications were, however, disappointed. Poor Sir James was perfectly happy; nothing could exceed his wife's kindness and attention. She nursed him in illness, seldom left him, even when in health, and forestalled all his wishes.

Each summer, Sir James and Lady Ramsay visited some watering-place, in hopes of restoring, or improving his health. They spent one season at Baden-Baden. Lady Ramsay liked the place, and Sir James liked to see his pretty Fanny dance at the Kursal, as he sat in a corner, supported by cushions.

That the said pretty Fanny may have flirted more than she—in very strict, strait-laced prudence, and under her peculiar circumstances—ought to have done, is possibly true; but that she deserved the jests and sneers, levelled at her and her invalid husband, is certainly false. An Austrian of small waist, and large moustache, chose, one evening, to be particularly facetious upon the occasion. He even went so far as to hint, that he himself possessed no small portion of

the affection, which the lady did not bestow upon her husband. Ill-nature passes current for wit ; few can discriminate between epigram and slander. A large knot of listeners applauded these sallies. But they were brought to an untimely end. A box on the ear, dexterously applied, felled him to the ground.

Charles Stanly's hand had dealt the blow. He had come over from Heidelberg, where he was then studying, to see Lady Ramsay. He entered the room just as the insulting conversation was at its height, and avenged her in the summary manner we have described.

Austrians were, at that time, generally unpopular, and this particular Austrian especially so. Charles was young, handsome, and the ideal of a student. The tide ran in his favour. Men applauded, women sobbed. The choice was fainting, or hysterics. Lady Ramsay overwhelmed him with thanks ; he gaily offered his arm, and handed her to the carriage. Sir James followed. As soon as he had seen them safely off, Charles returned to the scene of action, in expectation of a challenge from the bully. Nor was he disappointed.

This little affair terminated brilliantly for our hero. The vanquished Austrian had been hitherto considered invincible. The story flew from mouth to mouth. No story loses from being repeated. Exaggerated reports were circulated, and Charles was foolish enough not to contradict them as flatly as he might. But few young men of nineteen can distinguish note from notoriety.

When Charles next went to see Lady Ramsay, he looked very pale, and wore his arm in a sling. It might be that she was not as much displeased by the *éclat* of the adventure as she thought fit to appear; at all events, she took no pains to conceal her admiration of the scornful smile, that curled his lip, as she reproached him for thus wantonly exposing his life, and forthwith she insisted upon having his picture. He consented to sit for her, provided she would sing to him all the time. She sung delightfully.

The student's dress was picturesque and becoming. The open shirt collar, the flowing hair, and especially the black ribbon supporting the wounded arm, enhanced his manly

beauty. The miniature was pronounced very handsome, and very like. Lady Ramsay had it splendidly set, and laughingly declared that she would keep it, in trust, for the future mistress of his heart. He, with playful gallantry, protested that none could ever rival her in his affections. She blushed, frowned, and scolded Charles as an abominable flatterer. But the expression of her lustrous eyes did not testify any very serious displeasure.

Sir James and Lady Ramsay returned to England soon after this affair; but no lack of fair admirers were left behind. The duel had made a deep impression on their susceptible Saxon hearts, and all the Heidelberg ladies raved about Charles. He studied creditably, but he waltzed divinely. He was liked both by professors and students. He flirted with the daughters of the former, and fought himself into good fellowship with the latter. In short, his light heart, his high spirits, and a lavish expenditure of money, made his society universally and deservedly sought.

Charles was just at the age, when the real,

and ideal, struggle for mastery over the mind, and sway it alternately. He was at the age, when the imagination is purest, though the passions are strongest, for feeling has not yet matured into reflection, and the touch of fancy has still power to convert into poetry, the most ordinary prose. Visions of brightness and beauty haunted him by night, and by day; recollections and anticipations blended themselves into an ideal, glorious, but transient. One image only assumed a tangible form, and recalled the happiest days of boyhood. It was that of a lady of extraordinary beauty and endowments, to whom he had secretly addressed many a poetical effusion. But he admired her too deeply to praise her lightly, and the verses she had inspired had always been carefully concealed from her. Years had elapsed since he saw her, and in this interval, divers other fair images had fired his imagination; but hers always returned brighter than all—one thought of her obscured the rest. There was something about this lady which had taken a strong hold of his youthful fancy—something which at once attracted and awed him.

He had no distinct recollection of her person ; yet he was influenced, though unconsciously, by her opinions.

She was still the heroine of many a delicious reverie. These did not, however, interfere with his amusements. Charles was foremost at every party of pleasure ; his mad pranks seemed fabulous. He out-studented all the students of his day, not one could vie with him, in wildness. His song was the jolliest, his laugh the merriest, his valse à deux temps the most irreproachable. With so many various and valuable qualities, it was no wonder, that the men respected, and that the women idolised him.

One young lady, the fattest, if not the fairest of his admirers, soon began to distinguish herself by her just appreciation of his merits. He, as in duty bound, rewarded her discernment by dancing with her oftener than with any of her rivals.

This lady's name was Molly Fischer, and her father was professor of philosophy. He was writing an erudite work to expound a new system, which he had just invented, and which was to overthrow all previous ones.

It had the merit of being less intelligible and more diffuse than any of its predecessors. His lectures were prodigies of mysticism, and, of course, well attended.

Charles never missed one of these, nor did Molly either. He generally walked home with her to philosophise, or to flirt, as the case might be. Molly was as fond of mysticism as her father, but with her, instead of a philosophic, it took a romantic turn.

Thus passed one winter, and part of the ensuing summer. The balls had long ceased, and the vacations were about to begin. Charles was soon to leave Heidelberg for ever. He had finished his studies—that is, he had spent the usual number of years in acquiring knowledge, which he was immediately to forget.

Charles, though delighted to return to England, could not but be sorry to part from Molly. Poor Molly had, of late, become very low-spirited. She would sit for hours at the window, her head resting upon her hand. This window looked upon the street, through which he passed daily, and daily he

saw her look more and more disconsolate as he walked to, and from college.

Our hero was, naturally, much moved by this behaviour; therefore, by way of consolation, he took an early opportunity of telling the fair Molly, that he was soon to leave Heidelberg never to return.

This dreadful confirmation of her fears was too much for her; she burst out crying. Charles anxiously inquired the cause of her grief. She replied by asking his opinion of suicide.

Before he had determined how he should answer so delicate a question, Molly was deep in lamentations and explanations concerning the difficulties of the situation in which she was placed.

Hers was, she said, an extraordinary case. Her father wished her to marry a rich man, whom she hated, while her affections were bestowed upon another object. Her heart was torn between duty and love. Her only hope was suicide.

And forthwith she plunged into an eloquent argument in its favour. Charles endeavoured to combat so dreadful an opinion,

but she had the best of it in intricacy, as well as in lengthiness.

She concluded, as she began, by protesting that she had determined to put an end to herself, rather than live without the man she loved. His name she would never disclose; it was a secret which should die with her.

Charles had, indeed, never inquired it. The question was unnecessary. Without any inordinate vanity on his part, he could not help seeing that he was himself the absorbing object of her young heart's affections.

The preference of so charming a creature, could not be otherwise than flattering. Molly was not exactly a beauty; but there was, just then, a scarcity of good looks at Heidelberg. To be sure, her eyes were small, but they expressed enormous admiration of him. Her voice could not be called sweet, but honey itself was nothing to her words. And then her conversation! her mind! her soul! Besides, who will deny that mental are superior to personal attractions! that wit is better than beauty—especially when no beauty is at hand!

Time passed by, and the day of his departure

approached. His fellow-students were loath to part with their favourite companion.

They gave a supper in his honour. It was a joyous one, although given on so melancholy an occasion. The wine circulated freely, and song succeeded song. The party did not break up till a late hour. Charles, flushed and excited, felt no inclination for rest. Therefore, instead of going to bed, he strolled along the banks of the Neckar.

Presently he heard footsteps behind him, but supposing that some of his companions were following, he walked carelessly forward. Presently, to his horror, a female figure, with dishevelled hair, rushed frantically past him towards the water's edge. Charles flew after it, and arrived just in time to prevent the fatal plunge.

"Let me die!" said Molly, for it was she.
"Let me die! I have lived and loved!"

"Thekla!" exclaimed Charles, naturally struck by the aptness of the quotation.
"Thekla! live! I adore you!"

The lady replied by throwing herself into his arms. At that critical moment, her father suddenly appeared.

The venerable sage rebuked Charles more in sorrow than in anger. Although above the petty cares and concerns of this contemptible world, he must, he said, confess to one weakness; he must own himself vulnerable upon one point—his daughter—and the old man's tears began to flow.

She was his only child—the support of his declining years; her heart was broken, her happiness was at stake; he would not reproach Charles, but he would trust to the dictates of that noble heart.

That noble heart was beating very fast indeed. There could be only one cause for such emotion. So Charles fell at Molly's feet, declaring that he was ready to make any reparation in his power, if she would but generously forgive him.

Her generosity on the occasion exceeded his expectations. Not only did she grant his pardon, but she granted her hand along with it; of her heart, as she said, casting down her eyes, he had long been possessed.

The expression of Charles's gratitude was stifled by an embrace from the tender father. He kissed him on both ears, called him his

dear son-in-law, and walked home with him, pouring forth affectionate epithets all the way.

But, strange to say, things appeared, next morning, in a somewhat different light, and the divine Thekla was again the fat Molly, with whom Charles had flirted, but never dreamt of marrying.

He went to see her, however, at the usual hour. She perceived, in a moment, what was passing in his mind, and acted her part accordingly.

She saw that her prize must be secured now, or never. She was too wise to trust to promises of returning; the departure must be prevented. For that purpose, she burst into tears, and declared that she was determined to die the moment he left Heidelberg.

Charles did not very well know how to answer, but he talked a great deal about faith, and hope, and unalterable affection.

The lady evinced no doubt of his sincerity—still she had presentiments, and forebodings, and misgivings. Her rich lover was soon to arrive. Her father would insist upon her marrying him; she doted upon her father; could she refuse his request, and bring down

his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? No! she would rather—ten times rather—die.

She gave Charles no time to consider of the slight contradictions in her statement. Why her death was less likely to distress her father than her celibacy, she did not attempt to explain. It is easier to rant than to reason—it is sometimes wiser.

Accordingly, Molly ranted and raved to an incredible degree. She was mad, she was in despair, she was heart-broken; she had but one hope left—the Neckar; that river still flowed through the valley, and as she seemed to believe, entirely on her account. Again, suicide—that dreadful word, sounded high above sighs, and tears, and sobs. It was a harrowing scene.

Charles was melted. What he might have said or done, or to what follies he might have pledged himself, it would be difficult to surmise, had not the mild philosopher entered the room.

This apparition brought Charles to his senses. The old gentleman, instead of being, as usual, mazy and metaphysical, spoke with

remarkable distinctness, and exceedingly to the point. His meaning was clearly this: Charles must marry his daughter before leaving Heidelberg.

Moreover, it struck Charles as odd, that this venerable sage should always be at hand, in moments of emergency. Why, if a rich suitor was to be had, the said old gentleman should be so vehement in his preference of himself, was also difficult to conjecture. But the oddest thing of all was, how he could have become so well-informed respecting our hero's position and prospects, as he, in the ardour of conversation, unwittingly proved himself to be. This last fact was not only odd, but suspicious.

Not knowing very well what to say, Charles made a low bow, and was about to leave the room, when Molly, having exhausted all her arguments, was reduced to scream. She fell back fainting into her father's arms. Charles paused for a moment, gave one sigh to this interesting victim of his irresistible fascinations, and left her to the care of her affectionate parent.

All the way home he was haunted by her

image, that scream of despair sounded in his ears. In this frame of mind, he sat down and wrote her a long letter. He must, he said, go immediately to England upon urgent business—in fact, he had no money, and some debts—but he hoped soon to arrange matters, and to return, and claim her as his own.

He then wrote a hasty line to Lady Ramsay, announcing his immediate arrival at Eastrow Castle, her country seat, packed up his clothes with all possible despatch, and set off instantly for England.

CHAPTER II.

OUR hero's journey was prosperous. He reached England, and Eastrow, without impediment or adventure.

The first sight of the noble castle among the trees, overwhelmed him with recollections of the past. There had been spent the happy days of childhood. There he had been indulged, and loved with more than parental affection. He thought of Lady Ramsay's kindness, and of his abuse of it. He remembered, and fancied he still tasted, the bonbons with which she used to coax him out of his perverse fits, and win him back to his wonted good humour. Every turn in the road told its tale, every tree recorded its anecdote. Here, he had mounted the unruly pony, there, he had sported with the forbid-

den dog. Every step he took recalled, on his part, some act of rashness, and on Lady Ramsay's, some trait of kindness.

How she loved to praise ! how she shrank from blaming him ! And when his misdemeanours could no longer be concealed, how ingeniously she excused them ! How skillfully she knew how to convert his faults into virtues ! His disobedience was independence of spirit, his relish for forbidden fruit, ambition and love of enterprise ! How eloquent she was against tame submission, and meanness of soul. Of these failings she knew that none could accuse her favourite. How she extolled bold spirit and firmness of will, qualities which she ascribed to him. When Charles recollected her ingenious arguments in his favour, he longed to throw his arms about her neck, and give her—a good hug—as he was wont to do in old times, whenever he had been unwarrantably rebellious, and she, injudiciously kind.

For he could not but feel that he had much need of her indulgences ; kind as she was, his heart misgave him when he thought of the confession which he had to make. During

the journey, his spirits had been constantly on the decline, and now his courage well-nigh failed him altogether. How should he ever find words to tell Lady Ramsay of his affair with Molly? How should he introduce the subject to her? In the letter announcing his arrival, he had thrown out sundry mysterious hints relative to a singular adventure, in which he had become, as he expressed himself, inextricably involved. He had descanted loftily and vaguely about the dictates of fate, and talked much of unalterable attachment; but, truth to tell, his attachment had already undergone considerable alteration. He sorely repented him of the tone he had assumed in his last letter to Lady Ramsay, and he had little inclination to keep up the character he had given himself. Every mile which separated him from Heidelberg, diminished his illusion with regard to Molly; in plain English, he was heartily ashamed of the whole business.

The carriage stopped at the lodge, and a well-known old face appeared at the gate. The good woman looked exactly the same as when he had last seen her. There was the same contented smile, the same low curtsey,

the same snow-white cap, the same smooth, clean apron. Her broad, north country accent was familiar music to his ears; but the strain which was once gay now appeared sad. In fact, Charles's spirits had, by this time, sunk very low indeed. The recollection of Eastrow and its comforts, made him shudder at the thoughts of Heidelberg, and of his promise to return there. Nor did Molly's image, large as life in the foreground, enhance the beauty of the picture. He was provoked with himself for having been such a fool, and still more provoked with her for having made him one. He held out his hand to the old woman, who stood smiling and curtseying, and smoothing down her apron; but he had no voice to speak to her; and when she greeted him, as of yore, by the appellation of "bonnie Master Charlie"—though he could not help smiling a little—he could have cried with vexation and annoyance.

Charles got out of the carriage, and proceeded on foot towards the house, that he might gradually become accustomed to the strange familiarity of the well-known objects

which met him at every turn. He thought of all his old friends, wondered if he should find them altered, and wondered whether they would think him so. Who were likely to be staying at the castle? It was some time since he had heard of the proceedings there, for he had been of late so much occupied with Molly, that his correspondence with Lady Ramsay had, in consequence, considerably flagged.

While he was speculating upon these and other things, he heard a light step behind him, and he felt a soft, round arm draw itself within his.

“My own boy!” said the sweetest voice imaginable.

“Dear Lady Ramsay—is it you?” was his exclamation.

“My dear boy! I can hardly believe that I have really got you again!” She went on, in broken sentences: “How anxiously I have expected you! How eagerly I have watched for you! But you are come at last, and all is well!”

There was a moment's pause—then she proceeded with increasing emotion: “What

an extraordinary change in so short a time ! How manly you look ! and how—handsome,” she whispered, as she smiled softly. “ I should hardly have known you—and yet, after all, it is the same dear old face still !” She gazed at him with more than a mother’s pride and fondness, as she said these last words.

To be looked at by eyes handsome and approving, cannot be supposed to be displeasing to any young man. By the time they had reached the lawn, Charles felt his spirits considerably improved.

“ Oh, Lady Ramsay !” he exclaimed, looking up at the stately pile of buildings in front of them. “ How happy I am to find myself here once again !”

“ And I am no less happy to have you with me,” she replied, kindly. “ Though I can hardly believe the tall man I now see is, in fact, the naughty boy who used to terrify me with his mad pranks. Do you remember,” she continued, turning towards the sea, which fronted the castle at the distance of about half a mile — “ do you remember the day when you insisted upon going out in a boat,

when the waves were mountains high; and afterwards, though you had been dreadfully sick, declared that you had never in your life spent so delightful a day? And do you remember being lost in the woods, and being found at three in the morning up to the chin in mud, at the bottom of one of the ravines? Oh, what a sad, wild boy you were! And as wild as ever still, I've a notion," she added, smiling archly. "I long for the last episode."

"At all events, I promise you that I shall never again be found up to the chin in mud at three in the morning," Charles said, forcing a laugh.

"Oh, you evade my question, do you, young gentleman. But we will bring you to your confessions in due course of time."

"Time enough for that. Meanwhile, let me compliment you upon your good looks. Time seems to have gone the wrong way with you. Really, Lady Ramsay, you look much younger than when I saw you a year ago, and infinitely handsomer."

"Still at your old tricks, I see! But I'm proof against flattery now—I am grown quite

steady, and old, and serious ;” and she laughed merrily.

“ I protest against all three,” said Charles. “ I doubt both your seriousness and your steadiness, and as for your being old——”

“ Oh, but I choose to be old,” she replied, with meek gravity. “ I am determined to consider myself an old woman, in order decorously, to preach and praise to my heart’s content. As an old woman, I may, sans conséquence, admire your talents and your good looks, and I may be as proud of you as I please, without endangering your modesty.”

“ And I choose to consider you a young woman, which enhances your compliments, and gratifies my vanity. And I defy you to prevent me thinking what I choose—you cannot tyrannise over my thoughts—in one sense of the word, at least—though no lady, young or old, is more likely to do so, in another.” He bowed with playful gallantry.

Lady Ramsay’s colour rose. “ Time was,” she said, very softly, “ when I liked compliments as well as most people—and got as many, perhaps—but all that is over now.” Then bursting into the old merry strain, she

went on. "So you are as bad as ever, you wicked boy, and you think to come over me by coaxing, do you? but you'll soon find your mistake—you'll soon find that I'm grown wise, which is synonymous for cross, and that I'm not to be humbugged now. Make up your mind to be kept in order, my fine young hero—ah, in terrible trim order." And she held up her finger in a menacing attitude, and looked at him with the most fascinating frown imaginable.

He bowed in meek humility, and placed one knee theatrically upon the ground. Lady Ramsay laughed, blushed, and lightly touched with her lips his high and handsome forehead.

"Well, I accept your fealty, so let us be friends for the present. To-morrow I expect I shall have to read you a very serious lecture, though upon what text, I am as yet in blissful ignorance."

Lady Ramsay now took Charles's arm, and they walked up and down the lawn, talking and laughing. She related many anecdotes of persons whom he had formerly known, and which, told as she knew how to tell them, were exceedingly diverting. What Charles

had said about her looks was strictly true; he was really surprised at her beauty and juvenile appearance. Having regarded her formerly in the light of a parent, he had not thought about her personal attractions; but now, the case was different, and her evident admiration of his good looks did not diminish his favourable opinion of hers.

In the middle of one of her most pointed anecdotes, she suddenly exclaimed, glancing at the clock in the turret, "Good Heavens! how late it is. I must leave you now."

"No, no," said Charles, in his old manner, half playful, half wilful, "you must not go yet. Indeed, you shall not go. I cannot spare you."

"Nonsense, Charles!" she replied, pulling away the hand by which he sought to detain her. "I was right when I said you were as wild as ever. Behave yourself better, or I shall be obliged to put into execution some of my terrible threats." And she tried to look very grave indeed. But it would not do; she burst out laughing. "Seriously," she said, "I must go to Sir James. He expects me at this hour. Poor Sir James! You will

see a sad change in him, Charles. He has been very unwell of late."

She looked sorrowful as she spoke these last words, but the shade soon passed away, and she resumed gaily: "Oh, that *is* fortunate! Here comes my brother, just in time to take my place. I'm so glad he is going to allow himself a little air, poor fellow! He does pore so intently over those nasty, fusty law books. Come, Frank! Here is a gentleman you may perhaps remember. Should you have known him again? He is half a head taller than when you last saw him."

And away she tripped, sportively kissing her hand to her brother as she passed by him. Charles watched her spring lightly up the steps into the house. In spite of her six-and-thirty years, and a little, a very little, too much embonpoint, her figure might still be called beautiful. At twenty, her step could not have been more elastic, her voice clearer; and her laugh was mirthful and silvery as a child's.

The brother and sister were alike, both in person and mind. Like Lady Ramsay, Frank Tyrrell was cheerful and good tem-

pered. He had more talent than she, but less tact. Both viewed things on their sunny side, but she overlooked the shadow, while he saw through and beyond it. Her perceptions were quick, his intelligence was clear, and what, in her, was simple good-nature, was, in him, active, self-denying benevolence.

At an early age, the noble qualities of his mind had been called into action. Those disastrous circumstances, before alluded to as having occurred in his family, threw him upon his own resources. Frank's vocation was for law. At first he had to struggle against innumerable difficulties; but when Lady Ramsay married, she was able to assist him. She spared neither money nor interest on his behalf. Her generosity was well requited; he studied hard, and at the end of ten years he had worked his way well, and acquired a respectable practice.

There was a strong family likeness between the brother and sister. But if Frank was the superior in mind, in personal appearance, the advantage was all on Lady Ramsay's side. In fact, she was very handsome, and he was not. Her eyes, large and dark, were at once

sparkling and soft; his were smaller, and light in colour, but the kindliness of their expression atoned for other deficiencies. Both liked society; both had a keen appreciation of the ludicrous; but her manners were suave and caressing, his, simply cordial and honest.

It was a pleasure to behold Frank's happy smile, as he welcomed his young friend. Charles had always been fond of him; it was impossible to live with Frank and not to love him. Still, there was a certain awe mingled with Charles's affection—he felt Frank's superiority somewhat painfully. He was not as much at ease with him, as with his sister.

This feeling, however, seemed in a great measure to have worn off, to judge, at least, by the confidential way in which the pair talked over old times. Charles plied Frank with questions respecting Eastrow, and everything in, near, or belonging to it. Before half of these were answered, the dressing-bell rang, and they went in to prepare for dinner.

When Charles had completed his toilette, he descended to the dining-room. There he found Frank, with his mother and sister.

Mrs. Tyrrell, the mother, had been a beauty, and could not forget it. Her monomania was a horror of anything vulgar. Herself she considered the perfection of all that was refined and lady-like. In illustration of this idea, she sat, all day long, upon a sofa, with carpet-work in her lap, speaking little, and thinking less.

Arethusa, her unmarried daughter, was decidedly a fine girl. Nor was she at all unconscious of the fact. Her special pride lay in her bust and her long, fair ringlets, and these were certainly her best points. A series of successive, though not successful attachments, had occupied her time. It had indeed been fully employed. From fifteen upwards she had always at least one flirtation on hand. Fortunately for her peace of mind, she changed her lovers as easily as the fashion of her dress, and always managed to be on with a new love before she was quite off with the old one.

Charles had never particularly cared either for Mrs. Tyrrell or for Arethusa; still, after so long an absence, he was glad to meet such old friends again, and he advanced towards the former with a cordial greeting.

Mrs. Tyrrell held out two fingers to him, and smiling languidly, said that she was happy to have the pleasure of seeing him. She then smoothed the braids of her hair with the palm of her hand, and having arranged her sleeves in graceful folds, sank back upon the sofa, as if overpowered by so great an exertion.

Arethusa protested that she was not only delighted, but overjoyed; and declared that to encounter so unexpectedly so old an acquaintance was dreadfully exciting.

While Charles was considering what answer he should make to so neat and appropriate a speech, he was startled by hearing a loud crash behind him. Turning round to ascertain its cause, he perceived a fire-screen upon the ground, and a young lady lamenting over the mischief she had done.

“Dear!” she exclaimed, very nervously, “how awkward I am! I’m so sorry.—Thank you,” she added, addressing Charles, who had assisted her in repairing the disaster.

Arethusa introduced this young lady as her dearest friend, Miss Foster—“sweet Aurora Foster.” The romantic name of Aurora had

something in it very absurd when applied to the little, squat, ugly girl who stood hesitating and flushing, evidently quite overpowered by the compliment.

At last, having stumbled over a footstool, and torn three tucks out of her dress, she acquired sufficient courage to say, in a queer, jerking sort of manner, that "Poor Sir James was so ill, and poor Lady Ramsay so distressed!—in fact," lowering her voice to a confidential tone, "the truth is, that he is going to have a fit—at least, I'm afraid of it; and Lady Ramsay says it would be a great comfort your going to dinner, and not waiting for her."

"I wonder how Sir James can reconcile it to himself always to have fits just at dinner-time," said Mrs. Tyrrell; "and what can make Fanny keep us waiting in this way I cannot think."

"He is ill, Mrs. Tyrrell, and she can't leave him," said Aurora, impressively.

"That does not make it the less ill-bred to keep people waiting."

"Come, mother, let us go to dinner," said Frank.

“As you please, Frank,” replied Mrs. Tyrrell, rising with more alacrity than, from the languid manner in which she had been buried among the sofa cushions, she seemed capable of exhibiting; “but not on my account. I don’t care whether I dine or not. I only wish eating could altogether be dispensed with.”

Just as Frank and his mother were about to leave the room, Lady Ramsay entered it, followed by Sir James. “I am very sorry that we have kept you waiting,” began Lady Ramsay, in her sweetest voice. “Sir James was a little faint, but he is all right again now. Take my mother in to dinner, dear Sir James,” she proceeded, addressing the latter, who stood staring about him, uncertain what to say or do, “and you, Charles, shall have the honour of taking me,” she added, smiling.

Charles was more than ever surprised at Lady Ramsay’s appearance. She certainly looked very handsome in her well-chosen demi-toilette. The freshness of her mind threw a youthful colouring over her person.

It was difficult to believe her as old as she really was. But the charm of her manner astonished Charles even more than her personal attractions. There was a striking contrast between the lustrous fire of her eyes and the extreme softness of her voice, which gave her a piquancy singularly fascinating. If she laughed a little too often, her laugh was so musical that the most fastidious critic could not have wished her more serious. Her conversation, it is true, never rose above the ordinary chit-chat of the day ; her narratives were often trifling, but her mode of narrating was always exquisite. Her anecdotes, though pointed and clever, were never ill-natured, and stopped just short of indecorum. She had a slight Irish accent, and a vast fund of Irish humour. None knew better than she when to talk, and when to listen ; and, above all, she knew that the grand art of pleasing is to be or seem pleased.

And Charles was really pleased. It was long since he had passed so agreeable an hour as that during which he sat by Lady Ramsay at dinner. He thought of the difference be-

tween her conversation and Molly's ; and his illusion, with regard to the latter, seemed to him more unaccountable than ever.

Sir James Ramsay sat at the bottom of the table, opposite to his wife, apparently quite unconscious of what was going on around him. Charles was shocked at the change one year had wrought in his appearance. But his tall gaunt figure still preserved that indescribable something, which characterises a gentleman. During the first part of the dinner he never uttered a syllable. However, when revived by a glass or two of wine, his heavy eye now and then wandered across the table, and a gleam of intelligence lit up his features as he looked at Lady Ramsay. There was something touching in the half-childish, half-tender, "Eh, Fanny! dear Fanny! pretty Fanny!" with which he apostrophised her, and which she never failed to acknowledge with a kind look or an affectionate smile.

When, after dinner, Charles entered the drawing-room, his first words were a petition for Lady Ramsay to sing. Up jumped Miss Foster from the piano, upon which she had

been strumming some old-fashioned tunes, and bounced towards the harp. She was so eager in her endeavours to get the instrument ready, that she cracked two strings at first starting, and then upset the desk with all the music upon it. These little disasters, however, being satisfactorily remedied, Lady Ramsay took her seat at the instrument.

Lady Ramsay looked to great advantage at the harp. Her attitude was graceful, and her rounded arms of remarkable beauty. Her performance was exquisite. Not that it could be called first-rate, but it possessed a charm which in first-rate performances is often deficient. Under her fingers the harp was not a mere instrument of wood and wire—it was a voice of pathos and poetry. The simple melody went straight to Charles's heart. He had heard the old tune a hundred times before, but never felt it till now.

Lady Ramsay saw the effect she was producing upon him, and was delighted to perceive it. The excitable Irish blood mantled in her cheeks, and every word she sang increased in expression.

When she had finished her song, little Miss

Foster jumped up from the exciting occupation afforded by tangled silk and balls of worsted, which tumbled out of her lap as she rose, and rolled about the room in every imaginable direction. Having chased and captured most of them, she bounced close up to Charles, and whispered hoarsely :

“Isn’t it nice, her singing? Don’t you like it?”

“Like it?” replied Charles. “No, I do not *like* it, but I’m entranced by it.”

“Dear ! I’m so glad.” And the good-humoured little grey eyes sparkled with glee. “But I’m sure you sing yourself. Now, don’t you?”

Charles looked awkward. This was a sore subject. He had been always very ambitious of excellence in singing, but all Lady Ramsay’s teaching had proved vain. He was really fond of music, and his ear was very fastidious as regarded the performances of others, but towards his own, it was painfully indulgent. He glanced towards Lady Ramsay, but not receiving any encouragement from her, he made an evasive answer to Aurora, muttering something about being

fatigued with his journey, and said that he would sing another evening.

Charles had no occasion to tell Lady Ramsay how much he was enchanted with her performance. He saw in her eyes that she plainly read his thoughts.

In these beautiful eyes was an expression very peculiar, and all her own. It produced upon Charles a strange, inexplicable sensation. He turned away his head. There was something in that dark, lustrous gaze which he dreaded to meet.

Sir James had been dozing in an arm-chair the whole evening. It was with difficulty that Lady Ramsay succeeded in rousing him. At last, however, she made him understand that it was late, and time to go to bed. She assisted him to rise, followed him up-stairs, and the party separated for the night.

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES went to bed in good spirits, but he rose, next morning, somewhat crestfallen. His impending conversation with Lady Ramsay suggested no pleasing ideas. He had a great dread of ridicule; he knew that she would laugh at him; and what was worse, he felt that he deserved it. There was, however, no escape, so he determined to put a good face upon the business, went down to breakfast with well-assumed cheerfulness, and talked away very volubly, if not very coherently.

When the meal was over, Charles made a virtue of necessity, and asked Lady Ramsay if he might be admitted into her boudoir. She nodded acquiescence, with a meaning smile, and a provoking look of drollery in her eye.

“Come along,” she said; “I am all impatience for the grand disclosure.”

“What a pretty room your boudoir is!” observed Charles, by way of opening the conversation.

“Thank you for the information. It was, no doubt, on purpose to enlighten me on this point that you sought this confidential tête-à-tête!”

“No, no,” he replied, with impatience. “But the fact is, that what I have to tell is not agreeable, and I really don’t well know how to begin.”

“Supposing I were first to relate a little anecdote I learnt this very morning, about a young gentleman of my acquaintance who got into an amorous adventure with a young lady, and then did not know how to get out of it again.”

She burst out laughing at the strange perplexity exhibited in Charles’s countenance.

“Pray, Lady Ramsay, be serious. It is anything but a laughing matter, I assure you.” He reddened to the temples as he spoke.

“How is it possible to be serious, with that

very, *very* comical face of yours before me? But, to please you, I will try." And drawing down her features to a solemn length, she said, with well-feigned surprise, "Is it possible that you are acquainted with the affair I allude to? It was confided to me as a profound secret!"

"Oh, Lady Ramsay, this is unkind! If you have heard the story, spare me the mortification of repeating it."

"Surely, Charles, you are not so innocent as to take the business seriously?"

"Indeed it *is* serious—very serious!"

"Oh, if you are seriously in love, and serious in your intentions, 'c'est autre chose!' "

"Lady Ramsay, do you know this story, or do you not?"

"I will tell you what I know," she replied, leaving off her tone of banter. "The day after I got your letter, announcing your arrival here, I received another from a gentleman signing himself Hans Fischer."

"Oh, the scoundrel!" interrupted Charles.

"Is he, indeed? Well, I thought as much. But wait till you have heard all. I could

make nothing of the letter; so hyperbolical and so poetical was its style, that it was quite unintelligible to my poor capacity. Accordingly, I wrote forthwith to some people I know at Heidelberg, and asked them for the solution of the riddle. This morning's post brought the answer, and a very circumstantial one, too. The whole thing is a great bore, and if you had remained longer at Heidelberg, you might have got into an unpleasant scrape; but as it is, I confess I do not quite understand your terrible perplexity. Do what he will, the old brute cannot make you marry his daughter by force."

"But I am sorry for the poor girl," said Charles, glancing at his own image in the mirror.

"Do you think she will die of love, poor thing? You are very fascinating, of course; still, I do not quite fear such a catastrophe."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, impatiently; "you know I don't mean that, but——"

"My belief is, that you do not exactly know what you mean. Depend upon it, Charles, the young lady is not one bit better than her dear papa. My friend wrote me all

about her. The fair Molly is a designing girl, beyond la première jeunesse, and in consequence desperately afraid of being an old maid, so she played a bold stroke to secure an advantageous marriage."

"Your information is incorrect, there. On the contrary, her father has vainly endeavoured to make her marry a rich man, whom she does not love. No, *her* motives, at least, are pure and disinterested."

"My correspondents enlightened me on that point also. It appears that the rich lover backed out just before you arrived at Heidelberg."

"He was daily expected there when I left it," said Charles, in a tone of pique.

"Is it upon the young lady's statement that you place such implicit faith?" Lady Ramsay smiled, with an air of provoking innocence.

"Really, Lady Ramsay, this is a point upon which you must allow me to judge for myself. You do not know the girl. I do, and I can answer for her being utterly unsophisticated, and anything but designing."

"Well, we will not dispute. I dare say you

are as clear-sighted as young gentlemen in love usually are. But if she is such a paragon, why, in Cupid's name, did you leave Heidelberg?"

"Because I disliked the father, and saw through his conduct. So, you see, I am not quite so blind as you imagine. In short, to tell you the truth, I got further entangled in the business than I intended, and thought it wisest to cut the matter short at once."

"Bravely done. But why did you write that tender epistle at parting, my wise young gentleman?"

Charles started with surprise. He had almost forgotten the letter. It had been written on the spur of the moment, and while his feelings were in a state of great excitement, and he did not now recollect what expressions he had used, or how much he might have committed himself by them.

"My dear Lady Ramsay, how did you hear? Who could have told you?" he exclaimed, in tones of alarm.

"Oh, you are amazed to find me au courant de vos affaires, are you? The fair Molly may be very charming, but she is not very discreet.

She showed the letter to her father, and he, as I am informed, intends to use it as an instrument against you. But never fear; Heidelberg is, fortunately, a long way off, and if you will let me manage the business for you, I will, somehow or other, get you out of the scrape. The fact of the girl's giving up the letter, is sufficient to silence all your conscientious scruples on her account. But, my dear Charles, the next time you fall in love, say as many pretty and tender things as you please; but never write them. Spoken words go for nothing, but black and white is quite another matter. However," she added, cheerfully, "*à quelque chose malheur est bon*; you will know better in future. Meanwhile, I think I can manage this business for you, and I hope that I shall be able to make both worthies answering to the aristocratic name of Fischer, as anxious to be off with you, as you are to get rid of them. You shake your head incredulously. We shall see who is right! But you must give me *carte blanche*, and let me fabricate a few fables respecting your uncle's having disinherited you, &c., &c."

"And I believe that you will only tell the

truth. Lord Overdale has never answered my two last letters."

"I never heard that he was celebrated for punctuality as a correspondent."

"No, of course not. But he used to write to me once a year, in his stately, sarcastic style, and now it is nearly two since I have seen a line of his handwriting."

"Indeed! I hope he will not hear anything about this delectable business. It must be brought to a conclusion as soon as possible. Let me manage it for you."

Lady Ramsay was fond of managing. Like most schemers, she preferred the tortuous to the straight path, even when the latter was shortest and easiest. The more intricate the by-ways, the more pleasure she took in threading their mazes. No difficulties could exhaust her energy, or weary her patience; and whether the enterprise was trifling or important, she was equally persevering, and in general equally successful.

It may be supposed that, in this instance, when the interest of her dear boy was at stake, she undertook her task with more than ordinary eagerness. She wrote to all sorts of

people and places, on the business she had at heart. Indeed, the number of letters despatched by her, in the course of that week, was absolutely marvellous.

Most agreeable was the mode of life at Eastrow. Lady Ramsay seemed born to be mistress of a country house. This had once been the perfection of social enjoyment. When she first married, Sir James was able to appear in society, if not to take much part in it. Eastrow Castle was then constantly full of visitors. Lady Ramsay possessed the art of bringing suitable people together, and of entertaining them suitably to their tastes. Above all, she did not entertain them too much. She knew well, that *pas trop amuser*, holds good in society, as *pas trop gouverner* does, in politics.

Of late, poor Sir James's health had become much more precarious. Lady Ramsay, therefore, was obliged to limit the number of her guests. Indeed, for the last few months, Miss Foster, the rector's daughter, was the only stranger admitted.

Mrs. and Miss Tyrrell were settled at Eastrow for the summer. Frank went and

came according to pleasure, or rather, according to business. He had a small house in London, which was also the home of his mother and Arethusa.

Charles's arrival was a great boon to the quiet party now assembled at Eastrow. Excepting with Miss Tyrrell, he was a general favourite. An old feud existed between these two. As a child, Charles disliked Arethusa for her grand airs and long words, and she hated the spoilt boy, who irritated her nerves, and rumbled her dresses. Now, indeed, the case was different. Charles was no longer a spoilt boy, but a pleasant, good-looking young man. On the strength of these merits, the fair lady tried to get up a flirtation with him. But, however remarkable her ingenuity in construing to her advantage any demonstration from the other sex, she could not but perceive that her advances were received coldly; and at the end of a week she was obliged to discover that Charles was not nearly so handsome as she had at first imagined him to be.

But Lady Ramsay's partiality to Charles had undergone no change. In her sight he

was the dear, wild boy still. She spoilt him now, as she had spoilt him formerly. She humoured his whims, she guessed his wishes, even before they were known to himself. She would set for hours listening to his plans, practicable, or otherwise. It was presently settled between them, that Charles was soon to become a very celebrated character indeed. Though by what means this end was to be accomplished, it would have puzzled either of them to explain.

No answer had been returned from Germany to Lady Ramsay's letters. Charles was much annoyed at this prolonged uncertainty. Lady Ramsay, however, was, as usual, sanguine. She was sure everything would turn out well. Her confidence imparted itself to Charles; at least, it prevented him from giving way to any great dejection.

But what was Lady Ramsay's surprise when, instead of a reply from Hans Fischer, she, one morning, received a large packet of letters from Lord Overdale. She had written to the latter, to announce his nephew's arrival in England, and the following was the answer he returned :

“DEAR LADY RAMSAY,—

“As you are so kind as to express an interest in my nephew’s welfare, you will doubtless be gratified by the perusal of the enclosed documents. They afford curious specimens of epistolary style. It has been well said, that *le style c’est l’homme*. The letters I now send, may therefore be instructive, as illustrating the characters of their respective writers. That the world is composed of two grand classes, I have been long aware, nor did I require the accompanying testimonials to convince me to which of these, my nephew belongs.

“It remains for me to apprise you of a fact, of which it appears, that both he and you, have hitherto remained ignorant. My nephew has nothing to expect from me, either during my life, or after my death. He is not my heir. His strange presumption, in considering himself such, is highly unbecoming. He had better, therefore, exert the superior talents with which you so generously endow him. Of course, these will be all-sufficient to render him hereafter as prosperous, as he has hitherto shown himself prudent. With such

abilities, the poor assistance I should be able, if I were willing, to afford him, would doubtless be superfluous.

“ I cannot conclude, without assuring you of my sincere admiration and esteem.

“ OVERDALE.”

In the envelope containing this characteristic epistle, were two other letters. One from Hans Fischer, to Lord Overdale, the other from Charles Stanly, to the fair Molly, his daughter.

The first began with sentiment, and ended with threats. Molly's desertion was dwelt upon with that pathos, which so unheard-of a circumstance naturally demanded. Then followed much good logic about broken vows, and broken hearts ; and the whole wound up with legal hints and legal phrases, in unintelligible German, and still more unintelligible English.

Charles's letter was annexed ; by way of proving the statements contained in the former epistle. And, if promises were equivalent to performances, Charles would indeed have been in an awkward situation.

His sentimental language, so different to his usual good-humoured fun, tickled Lady Ramsay's fancy, and by putting the whole affair in a ludicrous point of view, somewhat reconciled her to the disappointment at the failure of her diplomacy.

Charles was not so easily satisfied. Notwithstanding all he had said about not expecting anything from his uncle, the fact was, that he did expect a great deal at Lord Overdale's death; he had always believed that the estate must revert to him. He knew that it was strictly entailed.

Lady Ramsay wished to consult her brother on the subject, and put the whole affair into his hands, but Charles's pride revolted at the idea of letting Frank into the secret. Lord Overdale's letter, especially, mortified him much. He had not even courage to read it a second time over.

The more highly he thought of Frank's judgment, the more loath he was to expose his own follies before him. At last, however, he yielded to Lady Ramsay's entreaties, and the case was submitted to Frank. Frank embraced the subject with his usual clearness of

perception. He spoke plainly to Charles, but at the same time kindly, and satisfied him in the legal point of view.

It rested, he said, between Charles, and his own conscience, to fulfil his promises or not. Each man could best judge for himself, as to their value. In law, the letter did not oblige him to anything; it would be awkward, indeed, for young gentlemen under age, if such letters were considered legally binding.

If Charles pleased, he would write to the Fischers, and put an end to the matter. To this proposal Charles willingly consented.

Frank did not like the way in which Lord Overdale had taken the business. There was, he feared, something in the tone of his letter which boded Charles no good. This love affair was unfortunate, and the most unfortunate part of it was, its having come to the testy old gentleman's ears. It was just the sort of thing to exasperate him. Charles had now nothing left for it but to write him a penitent letter. But it must be carefully worded. Lord Overdale's temper was sus-

picious, and he had a happy knack of putting a false construction upon the simplest words and actions.

Charles wrote forthwith. Lady Ramsay assisted him in the composition. To both of them, it seemed a masterpiece of tact and diplomacy. But it was too much so. It contained too many assurances of repentance, too many tenders of affection. It was essentially a woman's letter; there was nothing open or honest about it.

The answer arrived in due course of post. It contained only the following words, written in Lord Overdale's large, bold, and irregular hand:

“I feel duly indebted for the extraordinary proffers of affection, it has been your pleasure to make me. These are, I assure you, superfluous. But, as you express so deep an interest in my welfare, I have great satisfaction in apprising you of an event, at which you will doubtless, greatly rejoice. I was married some days ago. Your congratulations on the occasion will, I am quite convinced, be no

less sincere than the affectionate expressions contained in your last letter.

“ OVERDALE.”

Here was a death-blow to our hero's hopes ! His uncle married ! and, if he should have a son, all Charles's prospects were for ever blighted ! And the whole business conducted in a manner so painfully mortifying ! Insult added to injury !

For some days, Charles luxuriated in the belief that all earthly happiness was at an end for him. He was the sport of fate. Misfortune had chosen him for her own. His only consolation was blank despair.

Lady Ramsay was indefatigable in endeavours to dispel this gloom. Her patience was inexhaustible. She never seemed weary of listening to his wanderings—“ Why had his uncle married ?—whom had he married ? At sixty, was he, or was he not likely to have a son ? ”—subjects upon which Lady Ramsay knew no more than he did himself. Still she wondered, and speculated with him ; endeavouring to throw in all the consolation in her power, and doing her utmost to distract his

thoughts from so unpleasant a theme. Every day, she devised some new plan for his entertainment. She would not trust solely to the charms of her own conversation ; and as, on Sir James's account, she could not have more visitors staying in the house, she took advantage of the fine season, and invited the neighbours to out-door amusements.

At first, Charles took little interest in these. He was utterly absorbed by his own misfortunes. He thought of nothing but his destitute situation. What had *he* to do with frivolous pursuits ? he would say. These were all very well, formerly, when he was Lord Overdale's heir ; but now he was a pauper, and must work for his bread. He wearied Frank with his endless speculations as to what profession it would be best for him to follow. Frank declined giving any positive advice on the subject. It was one, he thought, upon which every man must judge and decide for himself ; and he generally concluded these exhortations in Swift's words—
“ No man ever cut an ill figure who understood his own parts, or a good one who mistook them.”

For some time even Lady Ramsay's coaxing and flattery were of little avail ; even a boat-race, which she took great pains to get up, did little towards raising the spirits of her favourite. He had been fond of the water, and famous for his skill at rowing ; but he was out of practice, and would not try to regain the dexterity he had lost. In short, the whole thing was a failure.

At last Lady Ramsay bethought herself of a steeple-chase. When she proposed it to Charles, his eyes sparkled a little. He had always been a first-rate horseman ; and he loved the exhilarating exercise of riding. Moreover, there was danger in a steeple-chase—consequently excitement. There was even some hope of getting his neck broken ; and thus happily ending his sorrows and his life. Animated by this cheerful idea, he went with Lady Ramsay to mark out the course. He insisted upon following one which was beset with difficulties. One leap the grooms unanimously pronounced to be impracticable ; Lady Ramsay entreated him not to attempt it, but Charles was obstinate. His courage rose with the sight of danger ; and Lady Ram-

say yielded with the less regret, that she hoped his present excitement would effectually cure the despondency to which he had lately given way.

And, as usual, her woman's penetration was not at fault. Charles won the race brilliantly, and his triumph gave a salutary reaction to his spirits. Charles was himself again. That evening he volunteered to sing some of his German songs. They were slightly out of tune, and not particularly in time, but Lady Ramsay found no fault with them. Instead of laughing, as of old, at Charles's unfortunate musical efforts, she gravely praised the very moderate performance.

Nor were the other ladies less inclined to be indulgent. Arethusa protested that his singing was not only delightful, but charming—one student's song especially she never *could* get tired of hearing. Even Mrs. Tyrrell was roused to something like animation, as she joined in the universal praise bestowed upon him. She was distinctly heard to say that he was an elegant young man, and on two several occasions she exerted herself so far as to ask him to sit beside her

upon the sofa. As for Aurora, she became so husky and nervous whenever she attempted to mention his name, that she had not yet been able to get to the end of it; and although she was continually making efforts to that effect, Mr. St—— was all that had ever been audible from her lips. But, that she admired him prodigiously, was evident from the unusual straining of her little grey eyes, and the unaccountable contortions, and grotesque twitchings of her mouth.

It must be confessed, that Charles well deserved these golden opinions. Nothing is so fascinating as manner, and no manner was ever more fascinating than his. Its greatest charm was, that it was impossible precisely to determine wherein the charm lay. It consisted, perhaps, chiefly in that happy insouciance, that unsuspecting egotism, so pleasing in youth, but in youth only. When older people talk about themselves, we are disgusted by their vanity, or their selfishness. In the very young, on the contrary, we delight in these outpourings of the heart,—in that overflowing confidence which expects others to be interested in what interests them, and believes in universal sym-

pathy. Charles was, no doubt, on excellent terms with himself; but, though his vanity was manifest, there was nothing offensive in it. So far from being obtrusive, it seemed to reveal itself from pure unsophisticated naïveté, and simply because he expected the sympathy he was ready to give.

Charles was not slow in discerning that he had made a favourable impression at Eastrow, and took every opportunity of improving it; but his real enjoyment was in Lady Ramsay's society. Every day he took more pleasure in being with her. She did her best to make herself agreeable to him. Though she never neglected Sir James, and spent an hour or two in the morning reading the newspaper to him, and amusing him in various ways, still she always contrived to have plenty of time to devote to Charles. They had long daily rides together. On their return home, they would sit in her boudoir. Sometimes he read to her—Charles excelled in the talent of reading aloud—but oftener they would chat together by firelight. She never wearied of hearing him talk of his past frolics, or of his future plans. She never reminded him of any disagreeable

subject. The names of Molly and of Lord Overdale were never mentioned. It was as if these excellent individuals had never existed.

Frank rejoiced to observe this improvement in his young friend's spirits ; but he could not help thinking that he was getting too fond of the busy idleness of Eastrow life. He was wasting his youth in profitless pursuits. It was high time that he should have some better occupation than reading poetry or gossiping with Lady Ramsay. Frank loved his sister, but he was quite alive to her faults. He was aware that she was a dangerous guide for Charles. Her influence was likely to lull him to indolence, not to excite him to industry ; and his industry, as Frank knew full well, was very apt to relax.

To volunteer advice is generally a thankless, as well as a profitless, office. It was one to which Frank was especially averse ; but he hoped that his own good example might rouse Charles to emulation. The success he had achieved in his profession, did not prevent him from allotting to study a certain portion of each day ; and which neither boat-race, nor steeple-chase was ever suffered to interrupt. When

his work was over, he enjoyed, with the best of them, whatever fun might be going on. To all Lady Ramsay's urgent entreaties to throw aside his musty, fusty old law-books, as she called them, he remained quite inexorable. He only replied, that those who have to make their way in the world must work hard, and lose no time about it. Although, in general, he made no parade of his perseverance, once, in Charles's presence, he repeated this sentence twice over, and the second time, it must be confessed, a little pointedly. But Charles either did not, or would not, understand these hints.

The shooting season now commenced. Charles was a capital shot, and shooting became all in all. It would seem as if he lived for no other purpose.

Frank lost patience. One morning, when he saw Charles equipped in the dandy sporting costume which Lady Ramsay had procured for him from London, he could not help exclaiming, with a little sarcasm :

“Is it your intention, Charles, to make shooting the business of your life?”

“My dear fellow ! what can you mean ? I

am fond of the sport, and so are you, if I am not mistaken."

"True, but I do not allow it to interfere with more important occupations."

"But, at the present moment, I have none more important."

"Why have you not? It is high time you had."

"Time enough when the shooting season is over."

"You forget that it has but just begun."

"So much the better. I shall have more time to enjoy it."

"Do you expect of a sudden to become sedentary and studious?"

"I expect to surprise you with proofs of my industry. When the shooting season is over, I intend to work as hard as you, my sedate friend, can possibly wish."

"But you cannot fly all at once. You must first try your wings."

"Oh, Frank, my dear fellow, pray spare your metaphors, or, at least, keep them for a wet day. See how bright the sun is shining, and how high it is already. I must be off without loss of time. I have before me a very

hard day's work. The stubbles by the south lodge are by no means easy to walk through, let me tell you ; so, with your permission, I will now wish you good morning."

And Charles walked away, whistling a tune, in order to avoid any further remonstrance.

With his sister, Frank had no better success. He spoke to her jestingly, and he spoke to her seriously ; but he could not get her to attend to his remonstrances. Whenever Charles's name was mentioned, she either went off at score about his shooting, or his riding, or his boating, or anything but what Frank wanted, or else changed the subject altogether. She would not hear a word of future plans. No one was ever more dexterous than Lady Ramsay in avoiding an unpleasant topic.

But it was not easy to deter Frank from any purpose on which his mind was set. He always persevered in whatever he considered a duty ; and he thought it a duty to open Charles's eyes to the folly of his present mode of life. He allowed some days to elapse, quietly ; and then he made another attempt to bring his young friend to reason.

One evening, when they were sitting, after dinner, alone, it may be said—for Sir James scarcely heeded what was going on—Frank thus introduced the subject :

“I must soon leave you, Charles. Important business calls me to London, and will probably detain me there for some time. Before I go, I should like to be more satisfied about you. I want you to come to some decision with regard to your future prospects. I may, in some way or other, be able to assist you ; and I need not tell you with what pleasure I should do so.”

“Thank you, Frank. I doubt neither your kindness nor your ability. But I am sorry you are going to leave us,” he added, evasively.

“And I am sorry to go. Yet I should not so much regret the necessity if I were less anxious respecting you. I have known you from a child, and always regarded you as a brother. It is, therefore, but natural that I should take a brother’s interest in your welfare. You will not, I hope, think me impertinent in speaking as openly as I do.”

It was impossible to withstand Frank’s

kind manner. Charles answered with heartiness :

“To tell you the truth, I have thought a good deal upon the subject ; but cannot come to any definite conclusion as to my best line of conduct. Your sister says——”

“Oh, never mind what my sister says. A man should think for himself, and decide for himself.”

“True. But that is no reason why good advice need be neglected ; and, so far, her advice is good. She thinks that I am best calculated for an active life, and, therefore, that the army——”

“The army ! But you are beyond the age for obtaining a commission.”

“Oh ! that might easily be got over. Lady Ramsay is all-powerful with Lord Derwent ; and Lord Derwent is all-powerful with the commander-in-chief.”

“Yes, but admitting all these things, how are you to live ? The army is an expensive profession, and your means are not adequate to keep you in it like a gentleman.”

“I acknowledge the melancholy truth. But my uncle surely would not let me starve.

He ought to come down handsomely, and there is no knowing but he may. Indeed, I begin to think that his marriage, about which I was foolish enough to annoy myself, may, after all, not turn out so badly for me. He may have a son to be sure; but at sixty, that is not likely. His wife will probably humanise him. Lady Ramsay means to try to get acquainted with her somehow, and endeavour to gain her in my favour. The estate is strictly entailed. It must come to me sooner or later."

"And, meanwhile, do you propose living upon air?"

"Oh, Lady Ramsay will manage that. Her generosity, too, may perhaps shame my uncle into making me some allowance."

"Do not believe it—I know his character well; he will do no such thing. Take my advice, Charles. Make yourself independent of him. Exert your abilities, and show him that you do not want either his patronage, or his purse. It depends upon you only, to become a much greater man than my Lord Overdale, and no thanks to him."

“It is easy talking, but what would you have me do?”

“Choose your profession at once. Follow it steadily, and fortune will follow you. Above all things, keep free and independent. My sister has, doubtless, plenty of money, and plenty of will at your service; but if I were you, I should not be beholden to her, or to any other human being. Nothing is so demoralising as the consciousness of dependence—in plain English, subservience. It lowers both our moral and intellectual faculties. Think over what I have been saying,” he added, observing Charles wince and redden at the word subservience. “Remember, I do not presume to dictate, but only to suggest. I give you the benefit of my experience, such as it is; and am ready to use, on your behalf, all the interest I possess. Now, let us join the ladies. I see Sir James is getting impatient.”

The evening passed heavily. Charles did not ask Lady Ramsay to sing; nor did he volunteer any of his ditties. Miss Tyrrell, however, kindly undertook to entertain the

company with her last new song of "The Maniac." This startling performance was worthy of its name. It displayed the ravings and howlings of insanity with marvellous force and truth. The more so, indeed, as by beginning about half a tone too sharp, and ending at least a tone and a half too flat, the fair vocalist thus unconsciously contrived to enhance the appalling reality of the whole.

Unfortunately, poor Arethusa received little praise for her extraordinary exertions. Her mother exclaimed, "How sweet!" every time her daughter gave what the performer called *un éclat de voix*, and the audience a squall. Aurora waited for the end, and then burst into applause, with a rapturous explosion sufficient to cover the silence of the rest of the company.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK'S speech rankled in his young friend's mind. Charles had long striven to shut out the unpleasant reality ; but the words had been spoken, and he could no longer help acknowledging their truth. To enter the army without an adequate income, was madness. He had not an adequate income ; and yet he wished to enter the army.

After what Frank had said, the idea of borrowing from Lady Ramsay, what he probably should never be able to repay, was not to be thought of. He owed her already too many pecuniary obligations. The term subservient, had raised all his pride. No, he would never be subservient. But what would he be ? It was a difficult question. He could not answer it. So he looked at his watch,

found it was time to go out shooting, took his gun, and went out accordingly.

During his absence, Frank had a long conversation with his sister respecting Charles. He told her his mind plainly; and told her that by encouraging Charles in idle habits, she was making a bad use of the influence she possessed over him; that the happiness of his future life depended upon his not losing time; in short, he laid before her all the numerous reasons why the army was the last profession he should choose. Lady Ramsay coaxed and caressed, persuaded and prevaricated, but in vain. Frank was not to be put off from his purpose. He spoke still more strongly; Lady Ramsay made an angry retort; and the brother and sister stopped just short of a quarrel.

Charles returned from his shooting in no amiable temper. On that particular morning everything had gone wrong. The game was shy; the scent bad; the dogs stupid; the beaters lazy. He missed more game than he shot. Such a thing had never happened to him before. It was unaccountable.

Charles went as usual, when out of sorts,

straight to Lady Ramsay's boudoir. She received him with the usual sweet smile of welcome. If her brother had made her angry, no traces of irritation remained visible. Lady Ramsay, at all times attractive, was most so in her boudoir. The boudoir was the perfection of elegance and of comfort; the tea-service the perfection of Sèvres porcelain; her *déshabille* the perfection of good taste; and her reception of Charles the perfection of kindness.

She found no fault with his muddy boots, nor with his blackened hands. She placed his favourite chair in his favourite nook, and set before him a pretty footstool of her own work, regardless of his thick and dirty boots.

Charles's brow soon cleared. Long before dinner-time, Lady Ramsay had talked him into good humour and good spirits.

When they were seated round the table, after dinner, Lady Ramsay, with a smile of reconciliation, addressed her brother.

“Frank! who do you think is coming here to-morrow?”

He named several neighbours. At the mention of each she laughed, and shook her head.

“What should you say to your first love—the peerless Isabella, as you used to call her—and Sir James’s especial favourite?”

“Isabella! Miss Romaine!” exclaimed Frank, surprised.

“Isabella! Isabella! pretty Isabella!” muttered Sir James.

“Isabella Romaine,” replied Lady Ramsay—“she, and no other.”

“Isabella Romaine! It is a pretty name. How long it is since I have heard it!” said Charles, musingly.

“Can you really remember her?” inquired Lady Ramsay. “I should hardly have thought it possible. It is so very long since you have seen her.”

“Yes, no doubt it is a long time,” replied Charles, “but I remember her well.”

“Describe her, then,” said Lady Ramsay, jestingly.

“I do not know that I could do that; indeed, I have no distinct recollection of her person, further than a vague impression of its extraordinary beauty. And yet, I somehow think I should recognise her anywhere.”

“That point will soon be settled. She has

lately arrived in England with her mother and sister. I have invited them to Eastrow—for she was always a pet of Sir James's—and they will be here, I hope, to-morrow."

"Good Fanny! kind Fanny!" was faintly audible from behind a superb pyramid of peaches.

"Her sister! Has she a sister, then?" inquired Charles.

"A half-sister. Her mother married again. Did you not know it?" said Lady Ramsay.

"I may have heard it, but had quite forgotten the circumstance," said Charles.

"When I have a country house," observed Arethusa, in an under tone to her friend Aurora, "I shall never invite anybody to come to it who is younger, or handsomer, or cleverer than myself."

"There is nothing like good sense," simpered Mrs. Tyrrell, smoothing her braids, and looking approvingly at her daughter.

"I declare that's very true!" said Aurora, as if she had just made the discovery.

"But *you* shall come, of course, dearest," added Arethusa. "You may come and stay with me as often as you please."

“It is very odd that I cannot, at this moment, recollect who was Mrs. Romaine’s second husband,” inquired Charles.

“Oh, a horrid, worthless Greek, who used her abominably,” replied Lady Ramsay.

“To my mind, it is shocking to marry a second time. I cannot think how any woman can reconcile it to herself. I am sure I never could,” lisped Mrs. Tyrrell.

“But he was so handsome !” said Arethusa.

“Handsome enough ; but very good for nothing,” said Lady Ramsay.

“Alas ! who can help falling in love ? It is said that marriages are made in heaven ; and I am quite sure that there is a fate in everything,” said the sentimental Arethusa.

“He was an infamous scoundrel,” muttered Frank, between his teeth.

“I’m sure I should have been quite crazy about him,” exclaimed Arethusa.

“But it is very shocking to be wicked,” said Aurora, thoughtfully. “I believe, after all, it is better to be good even though one is ugly.”

“What he made Isabella endure is hardly to be believed,” proceeded Frank.

“At all events, she did not endure it long,”

said Lady Ramsay. "She run away from home."

"Dear!" exclaimed Aurora, "how very odd! It really is so romantic! Why did she run away?"

"Because it was impossible for her to remain," continued Frank.

"What made it impossible?" inquired Charles, thoughtfully. "It is very strange that I should have forgotten all these circumstances."

"You probably never heard them," replied Lady Ramsay. "You were a mere child at that time, and these were queer stories, such as would not have been good for your morals. Some say her father-in-law wanted to force Isabella into an uncongenial marriage; others, that he made love to her himself. In short, there was no end to the strange reports that were circulated, but I knew nothing for a certainty; Isabella is reserved, and never confided any of her secrets to me."

"There may be things which a woman of delicacy cannot disclose," said Frank.

"It is quite a romance," said Charles. "Do tell me more of her history."

“Frank knows more than I do,” replied Lady Ramsay. “He is her friend and counsellor.”

“All I can tell you,” said Frank, “is, that this man (Rodostomus was his name) was a profligate rascal, and that he behaved towards Isabella in such a manner, as to render it impossible for her to remain under the same roof with him. She escaped from Paris, where her mother and father-in-law were then living, and came to England. For some time she stayed here with Fanny.”

“And it is her own fault that she did not stay much longer. If she had chosen, she might always have found a home with me. But she has certain high-flown notions of independence, and so forth, which Frank admires, and I do not understand.”

“Yes,” said Frank, “I confess that I admired and fostered the noble spirit which prompted her to earn a livelihood for herself.”

“But to be a governess is so vulgar,” observed Mrs. Tyrrell. “What would people think of a lady being a governess?”

“And dangerous, too!” added Arethusa.

“I dare say there were sons in the family where she went to live, and that one of them fell in love with her, or she with him, or something of that sort; and, in short, there is no telling what might have happened.”

“But nothing did happen, Arethusa,” proceeded Frank. “On the contrary, she became a great favourite both with her pupils and with their mother. When the latter died, she left Isabella a small legacy, with a wish that she should continue to live with her daughters. This arrangement held good till the Greek died. Then Isabella, hearing that her mother was almost in want, flew to her assistance; and her own little pittance is all that the family now have to live upon. I heard, some time ago, that they talked of coming to England, but I did not know that they were actually arrived. How long will they stay?”

“Oh, that depends upon circumstances,” replied Lady Ramsay. “The fact is, as Isabella writes me, they want to try whether they can afford to live in England or not; and whether the climate will agree with the old lady, who is mighty fidgety about her health

and everything else. I fancy they will spend the winter in this country. They are coming to me till their plans are settled."

Charles had listened eagerly to all that had been said about Isabella. The romance of her story struck his imagination, and the mention of her name revived many vague associations, which had haunted him ever since his childhood, and which he was anxious to verify. In the course of the evening, he called Frank into a corner, and overwhelmed him with questions. He wanted to know every particular of Isabella's thoughts, words, and actions, from the time of her birth up to the present hour; and much as Frank had studied her character, he was not quite equal to that task.

"I remember," Charles went on, "that she helped Lady Ramsay to nurse me when I had the measles, and that she used to read to me for hours together; and I remember, too, that she never spoilt me."

"I almost wonder you liked her, accustomed as you were to my sister's petting," observed Frank.

"I liked her all the better for not spoiling

me. Besides, she always seemed more sorry to chide me than I was to be chidden. And then, she always talked sensibly to me, and treated me, not as if I were a child, but as a reasonable being. At ten years old she made me feel as if I were a man. How odd I should have forgotten these things, which now, of a sudden, return fresh and distinct to my memory."

"It is but now you have been reminded of them."

"True. But you, Frank, how did you come to know so much about Miss Romaine? You never met her at the time I speak of—at least, I do not remember you in connexion with her."

"I was then, probably, hard at work at my chambers. My acquaintance with her dates from an earlier period. Her father was the greatest friend mine had. Isabella and I were companions in childhood. We were first playfellows, and then she became my pupil. My father gave me the best education money could procure; hers being very poor, could afford her little instruction. I was proud to teach her all I knew, and gloried in

the progress she made under my tuition. In fact, though two years younger than myself, she soon got before me in everything, for her aptitude was very remarkable. Yet so gentle and amiable was her disposition, that she never would acknowledge her superiority, and our only quarrels rose from our mutual attempts to show each other off to advantage. I was then her only friend, and her greatest pleasure was to deserve my approbation. 'My peerless Isabella,' was what I used to call her; and indeed she deserved the title. Thus we continued intimate till her father's death, and then her mother took her to Paris. Soon afterwards, the misfortunes you know of, occurred in our family, and her sympathy was the greatest consolation I had. She was, at that time, very young, but her letters had all the sense and judgment of maturer years. They contributed, in a great measure, to wean me from the dejection into which I at first, sunk. But for her, I doubt if I should have had energy sufficient to contend with my misfortunes, or even to bear them as a man. All the good I have achieved is owing to her ad-

vice. She possesses not mere practical good sense, but there is about her, a lofty enthusiasm, and at the same time, a meek, Christian spirit, which makes her superior to any woman I ever knew."

"Poor Isabella ! It is wonderful, that with such beauty and such accomplishments, she never married !"

"No," replied Frank, gravely, "I think not. That she might have married, there can be no doubt, nor that she would have married, if she had met with a suitable match. By a suitable match, I mean a man who can understand and appreciate her. But that is no easy matter. As I have already told you, her character is a very remarkable one. Depth, and simplicity ; firmness, and gentleness, towards herself, and indulgence towards others, are, in her, harmonised into perfect equilibrium. Her feelings are intense, yet she has little passion ; her imagination is highly poetic, yet her judgment is sound and clear. Who can rise to her level ? Perhaps, after all, it would be best for Isabella never to marry," he added, with a sigh.

“ I do not agree with you,” replied Charles. “ I don’t see why, because she is superior, she is to remain single.”

This conversation revived in Charles’s mind innumerable thoughts, which had long lain dormant. He dreamt of Isabella all night, and her image—at least, an image, exactly corresponding to his ideal of perfect female beauty, and which he concluded was hers—appeared before him on first waking. He did not shoot that morning, and his perpetual fidgeting in and out of the drawing-room, where, in honour of the expected guests, the ladies sat all the morning, considerably annoyed Lady Ramsay, who was deeply engaged with her correspondence. She reproved him for his restlessness, and begged him to have mercy upon her ears, and not hum that dreadful tune. It certainly was anything but harmonious. He laughed, left the room, and returned, in five minutes, whistling the same tune, with more noise, and less melody.

Mrs. Tyrrell, sunk among the sofa cushions, wondered when they would come ; and inquired of little Aurora, who was sitting, bolt upright, beside her, whether she thought, she

would think her old friend Mrs. Rodostomus altered or not.

Aurora gave it as her decided opinion, that people generally do alter as they grow older ; and hazarded a confidential remark, to the effect that few look as well in age as in youth.

Arethusa's mind was engrossed with the problem of Isabella Romaine's age and height, as compared with her own. She informed the company in general, and Aurora in particular, that her age, being twenty-four, and her height, five feet five, and Miss Romaine being two years older, and an inch taller, the age and dimensions of the latter were, consequently, open to considerable censure.

Aurora agreed to this proposition as self-evident, and she contemplated her handsome friend's person in the mirror, as she arranged her ringlets, with as much satisfaction as the said handsome friend contemplated herself.

Lady Ramsay got very impatient. Luncheon was announced, and disposed of, and no guests arrived.

"I hate to be kept waiting," said Lady Ramsay, when she returned to the drawing-

room. It is too bad, to be kept in-doors all day."

"So it is, dear Lady Ramsay," put in Aurora, in her little croaking, consolatory way. "But it is so lucky it rains, for it signifies much less staying at home in a bad day, you know."

There was no denying this fact, and Lady Ramsay returned to her correspondence.

"I wonder," began Mrs. Tyrrell, complacently regarding the folds of her sleeves, "what Madame—(the long-sounding name of Rodostomus was quite beyond her)—will think of my work. Everybody says it is ugly, but I don't call it so very much so, myself."

"Dear!" exclaimed Aurora. "I'm sure, I dare say she'll think it very pretty indeed."

"Oh, no!" simpered Mrs. Tyrrell, gazing fondly at the harlequin-like canvas, as she held it up to the light, "I only did it to use up Fanny's ends of worsted. I invented the pattern myself; it really might be uglier; and I dare say it will come in for some use or other, though I do not at all know what, but I like to be employed, and to do useful work."

“It is a great comfort to be usefully employed,” said Aurora; “and I’m sure it’s very kind using up all Lady Ramsay’s ends of worsted.”

“My patience is at an end,” said Lady Ramsay, rising from her writing-table. “I’ll have Brown Bess saddled, and take a ride, notwithstanding the rain.”

“But if it rains you may get wet,” remonstrated Aurora, “and then you might catch cold,” she added, confidentially.

“Pray do not catch cold, dearest Fanny. It makes me quite unhappy to think of it,” sighed Mrs. Tyrrell, and she blew her nose by way of admonition.

“People don’t always catch cold when they get wet, you know,” comforted Aurora; and by way of tranquillising Mrs. Tyrrell, she began sorting her worsteds.

Lady Ramsay rung the bell impatiently, and desired that Brown Bess might be saddled.

Just then, Charles came into the room for about the twentieth time. He was quite out of breath, and his coat bore evident tokens of having been rained upon. “They will be here in a few moments,” he said, in flurried

accents. "I have just been to the end of the avenue, and I distinctly heard the sound of carriage wheels."

"Dear!" exclaimed Aurora, astounded by such extraordinary news.

Charles's prediction proved true; at last, the welcome sound of carriage wheels were heard. Lady Ramsay rushed to receive her guests at the hall-door. Long before Madame Rodostomus was visible, she was distinctly audible. Lamentations proceeded from the off corner of the carriage, became louder upon the steps, and reached their climax in the vestibule. "What could I do? things happen to me that happen to nobody else. Isn't it extraordinary, Lady Ramsay, all my bad luck? I wanted to be particularly early, and what was the consequence? I was too late—forgot my fur cuffs—found it out at the station, and had to go back for them; couldn't find them anywhere, and where do you think they were? on my own wrists all the time—wasn't it remarkable, Miss Tyrrell. When we got back to the station the train was off—who would have thought it?—and the next did not

start for two hours, and turned out a slow one—why, I can't imagine, and could get nobody to tell me, though I asked all the people I met with. Certainly, Mrs. Tyrrell," she added, as if she had quite made up her mind upon the subject, and would not upon any account be induced to alter it, "the ways of Providence are very unaccountable—I must say, very——"

Mrs. Tyrrell greeted her old friend with a bewildered simper, inquired her opinion of her work, but receiving no answer to her question, smoothed her braids by way of consolation, and painfully strove to comprehend a long story, about an unaccountable illness which Madame Rodostomus once had, as a girl, and which, as she endeavoured to impress upon her auditors, was solely, and entirely, caused, by neglecting to wear fur cuffs during a journey.

Madame Rodostomus was a smart, little old lady, lizard-like in her alertness, very voluble of speech, with a chirping voice, and a cheerful countenance.

Her daughters followed her into the room.

Isabella was tall, her carriage stately, her movements slow, and strikingly majestic. Her manner was so extremely calm, as to make her, at first, appear cold. But her smile was singularly sweet, and her voice exquisitely modulated. After the usual civilities had passed between herself and the ladies of the house, she went up to Charles, and holding out her hand: "This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Stanly," she said. "How long it is since we met! however, I have frequently heard of you from Mr. Tyrrell. But have you really forgotten me?" she added.

It is not surprising that she asked this question, for Charles stood gazing at her in mute amazement. Some moments elapsed before he could stammer out a very unintelligible, and very inefficient answer.

Meanwhile, Chloe, the little Greek girl, wandered about the room in search of recreation. Her efforts were eminently successful. She contrived, unperceived, to put Aurora's knitting into inextricable confusion; to substitute greens for blues, in Mrs. Tyrrell's papers of worsteds, neatly arranged by the said Aurora; to secrete the stopper of Are-

thusa's smelling-bottle, and to insert her thimble in its place; and, finally, to transfer the letters which Lady Ramsay had been writing, to the covers not intended for them. This last exploit remained undiscovered. Lady Ramsay wrote with that beautiful indefiniteness of style, and illegibility of penmanship, which renders lady's epistolary compositions conveniently applicable at all seasons, and to all persons.

Meritorious were the hostess's efforts to fill up, agreeably, the time yet intervening before dinner. Her well-turned speeches were uttered in a soft tone, and enforced by the sweetest smiles; yet even Lady Ramsay's social talents were not competent to dispel the chilly awkwardness indispensable to the opening scenes of English hospitality. Nobody dared mention it, but everybody thought the clock upon the chimney-piece must have gone wrong. Nobody ventured to suggest it, but everybody apprehended, that the servants had forgotten to ring the dressing-bell. At length, however, its welcome chimes were heard. Lady Ramsay started with relief, then commenting sweetly upon the rapidity with which

time passes with kind friends, and in congenial society, she piloted the ladies to their rooms.

Charles lingered behind. He could not recover the impression which Isabella had made upon him. He was still dazzled, so to speak, by her beauty. There was before him much more than the ideal of his dreams, a form much more lovely than the bright vision which had haunted him since boyhood. The tall, plastic figure, Juno-like, yet feminine, the pale, clear complexion, the full red lips, the small cameo-like head, and, above all, the classical outline of the throat and shoulders, were beauties such as outshone the most highly wrought creations of fancy.

And then the voice! low, yet clear, sweet, yet impressive, that voice which had often been recalled, he knew not how, in moments of enthusiasm. What happiness to hear it greet him as an old friend, and express pleasure at again meeting him. He construed her words into a meaning flattering to himself. She said she had often heard of him; and she smiled approvingly when she said so.

He felt as if he had known Isabella in some

higher and more perfect state of existence. It seemed to him, as if her appearance had already breathed calm into his soul, and harmonised his feelings. The only drawback to his felicity was the recollection of his own awkward behaviour. He must have betrayed his agitation; how could she guess its cause? She must think him ill-bred and ungracious. He tried to remember what answer he had made to Isabella's kind words, and he turned scarlet at the mortifying consciousness of not having made any at all.

Charles determined to take the first opportunity of atoning for this omission. He dressed himself with exceeding care, and, early in the evening, he took a seat beside Isabella. She seemed pleased with this mark of his attention, and began conversing with him, as with an old friend. Her long deep eyes spoke interest and approval; this was no doubt encouraging, yet, somehow or other, it was impossible for Charles to keep up the conversation.

Isabella was not what is called a good talker. She did not possess the art of speaking nonsense amusingly. What she said, though far from dogmatical, or pedantic, was sensible,

and to the purpose. She never talked but when she had something to say. It is needless to add that she was often silent.

But this evening, the fault was on Charles's part. He was the most silent of the two. His usual flow of small-talk, his lively anecdotes, failed him. His part of the conversation always flagged. It seemed as if, for thinking of her, he could not speak to her; as if he was so much engrossed by herself, that he was incapable of attending to her words. The repose of Isabella's manner agitated Charles. He became, for the first time in his life, nervous and shy. Generally, he was not apt to underrate his conversational powers; now he fancied their defects magnified. Whatever he said, appeared to himself trite and common-place. Even the sound of his voice jarred discordantly upon his ear. He felt every gesture to be abrupt and awkward. This exaggerated diffidence really produced the effect he dreaded. He began by answering at cross purposes; and ended by talking absolute nonsense. The conviction that Isabella must think him a fool, did not raise his spirits, or improve his powers. At

last, his misery was brought to a climax by Aurora, who, having talked Sir James to sleep, bustled up to Charles, and whispered audibly in his ear :

“Isn’t she lovely? I’m sure you must think so.”

Charles coloured up to the roots of his hair, and felt strongly inclined to bolt out of the room. However, he was presently relieved by Lady Ramsay’s taking a chair on the other side of Isabella, and entering into conversation with her.

But these ladies had not much to say to each other. Lady Ramsay made the most of polite nothings; these, however, produced little effect upon Isabella. They seemed, in short, to have few ideas in common.

Lady Ramsay soon got tired of this mode of discourse. She now began to speak to Charles across Isabella, and every now and then appealed to the latter for approval. Lady Ramsay was apparently in a sportive mood, for she seemed to take great pleasure in rallying Charles on his preoccupation and taciturnity. What fair lady engrossed his thoughts? she inquired, looking archly in his

face. With what letter did her name begin ? Should she guess—or perhaps Miss Romaine would assist her in the search. Isabella did not appear to relish these jests. She answered with a forced smile, and a dignified motion of the head.

Charles was terribly annoyed. The more so, as but a day or two before, he had allowed Lady Ramsay to joke with him about his former loves ; and he could not well, of a sudden, show his displeasure at what he had so lately encouraged. This, he felt, would be ridiculous, and he dreaded ridicule. He strove to give another turn to the conversation ; but Lady Ramsay persevered most teasingly, until Mrs. Tyrrell's childish tones attracted her daughter's attention.

“ Dearest Fanny, give us some music. Madame Rodostomus wishes for a song ; she says your singing is celestial.”

“ Indeed, I said no such thing,” interrupted the latter. “ What I said was, that my Chloe is a heaven-born musician.”

“ Both *my* daughters are heaven-born musicians,” said Mrs. Tyrrell, triumphantly. “ Dearest Fanny, do sing something.”

While Lady Ramsay was waiting for pressing from another quarter, Aurora bounced up to Charles and blew into his ear, so as to make him shiver and start : “ Ask *her* ; I’m sure *she* can.”

“ Will Miss Romaine give us some music ?” he said, very timidly.

“ I fear I cannot. Though fond of the art, I am no performer.”

“ But, without being what is called a performer, it is surely possible to give pleasure,” persisted Charles. “ The simplest melodies are often the most pleasing.”

“ Any style may give pleasure, but it must be good of its kind ; and in music especially, mediocrity is intolerable.”

“ Will Lady Ramsay be so kind ?” said Charles, abruptly.

“ Lady Ramsay will *not* be so kind,” she replied, turning away from him. Then, with her softest glance and her softest accents, she added : “ I could not sing this evening, Charles. Do not ask me.”

Aurora had serious thoughts of playing her tunes ; and, neglectful of her perambulatory balls of worsted, she was half-way to the

piano, when Isabella's denunciation against indifferent music stopped her; so, to cover her disappointment, she gave a short grunt, and ran after her balls as if she had just discovered their vagrancy.

Arethusa was less easily daunted. She had fidgeted about, all the evening, opening and shutting albums, striking stray notes upon the piano, and making random observations to the company in general—and Charles in particular—and of which, it must be confessed, he took little notice. But now the opportunity was too good to be lost; music was asked for, and nobody was willing to play; she, therefore, walked intrepidly to the piano, placed her "Maniac" upon the desk, and began singing with all her might.

She had not proceeded far, when she was startled by the sudden opening of the door. She turned round, and stopped in astonishment.

Little Chloe, dressed in a picturesque Greek costume, bounded into the room, flew up to her sister, threw her arms about her neck, and said, in the prettiest broken English imaginable:

“Chloe did go out—but Isabella must not be angry—Chloe couldn’t help it; the night was so lovely—the stars so bright; they called me out—they invited me to them. Oh, please, don’t be angry.” And she kissed her sister again and again, by way of stopping her remonstrances.

“You’ve caught your death of cold, of course,” screamed her mother. “Didn’t I tell you not to go out?”

“Yes, I know you did,” said the child, unflinchingly.

“Then why did you go?”

“Because I liked it.”

“You naughty, self-willed, spoilt child!”

“And pray who spoilt me?” she retorted, archly.

“You perverse, impertinent, troublesome little creature! You’ll be the death of me,” said the mother, “you will. You do nothing but what you like. You care for nobody but yourself!”

“Yes I do,” replied the child, petulantly.

“Chloe cares for Isabella—Chloe loves Isabella. Oh, she does love Isabella.” And she embraced her sister over and over again.

“ You darling !” said Aurora, bustling close to the child, with her eye-glass in her eye, and her head stretched forward, so as to bring her clumsy face almost in contact with the little Greek’s chiselled features. “ You are a pretty little darling. How old are you ? And what’s your name ?”

“ What’s that to you ?” replied the pretty little darling, contemptuously drawing back. “ I wish you would keep off. You’ve pulled half the hair out of my head.” And she pettishly extricated one of her long black tresses from the entanglements of a ponderous gold chain, which dangled about Aurora’s neck. Then the child, pirouetting round and round like an opera-dancer, whisked the ends of her plaits, at alternate angles, into Aurora’s face, who stood staring at her in amazement.

“ Oh, you naughty thing !” exclaimed Madame Rodostomus, in tones expressive of anything but anger.

Lady Ramsay, highly amused at the scene, called the child to her.

“ Oh, I like *you* !” said little Chloe, springing round like a bright fairy. “ I like you very much—you’re so pretty and nice—and

Chloe will dance her phyrrie dance for you," she added, as she skipped and frisked about the room, with the grace and agility of a kitten.

"What a sweet angel it is!" exclaimed the delighted mother.

"I thought you said just now that I was naughty, and spoilt!" She spoke with a strange sort of arch daring.

"Hold your tongue, and go to bed this instant!"

"No, I won't. I'm not sleepy." Then, with a sudden change of expression and manner, she struck up a recitative in a high soprano, strange, wild, almost unearthly. When the first stanza was ended, she began a dance, or rather a series of attitudes, requiring extraordinary pliancy and grace. A stanza and a dance alternately succeeded each other. At first, both were grave and measured, but gradually they became more and more animated, until at length, the attitudes were wildly rapid, and extravagantly fantastic.

Suddenly she stopped short. In a moment she was all softness and grace, then, with a

very low obeisance, she flew like a sylph out of the room.

“Didn’t I say she was a prodigy?” screamed the old lady, in ecstasies, “a real prodigy, though she *is* not a boy. I was quite in despair when she was born, and I asked for *him*, and was told it was *her*. There certainly never was anything so provoking. Other people have boys; and why mine are both girls, is what I never could at all account for.”

“Everything is for the best,” drawled Mrs. Tyrrell.

“It’s all very well for you, who have a son, to say so; but indeed it is a sad thing to be a woman, and a widow, and to be unfortunate from the day of one’s birth, as I have been.”

Frank now came into the room. He had vanished immediately after dinner, in order to study, and make up for lost time. In the morning, he walked over to the station to meet his friends, and his day had been wasted in waiting for them. He sat down by Isabella, and they soon got into conversation, apparently interesting and animated.

Charles felt uncomfortable. He could not imagine how it happened, that Frank and

Isabella should have much to say to each other, while he had himself got on so badly with her. He was jealous of Frank, almost angry with him. Though aware of their old friendship, he could not help watching them with an anxious eye. His answers to Lady Ramsay's questions were so utterly absurd, that it was clear he was not attending to one word she had said. At length, provoked by his absence of mind, she gave, though considerably earlier than usual, the signal to retire.

The ladies left the room. Frank went to resume his business; and Charles, not feeling sleepy, took an easy-chair, and a book.

He had not long occupied his comfortable position, when he was startled by the sound of Lady Ramsay's gay laugh.

"Sorry to interrupt your studies," said she, playfully. "I suppose you were trying to acquire the art of reading upside down;" and taking the book out of his hands, she held it up triumphantly, in its inverted position. "Oh, you naughty boy! Come, tell your old mother, which, of all the fair objects of your eternal affections, was, at that moment, para-

mount in your mind. When you make your will, you intend, I presume, like Voiture, to have your heart equally divided among each. He had seven, one for every day in the week, how many have you ?”

“ Oh, Lady Ramsay !” said Charles, with a gesture of impatience.

“ My dear boy,” she continued, in the same jocular manner, “ you know I am discreet, and silent as the grave.”

“ I really wish you would choose some other subject for your mirth. Don’t you see this annoys me ?”

“ How very absurd ! And it was only the day before yesterday that you said yourself—— But I won’t tease you, poor child. Let us talk of something else.” She sat down beside him ; with a soft glance, and a softer voice, she proceeded : “ I came to ask you what I shall say, de votre part, to Lord Derwent. I had a letter from him to-day, and I must answer it soon. He writes to know if he shall use, on your behalf, his interest with the commander-in-chief. He rarely exerts himself for anybody ; therefore, what he does say, is effective. There is no

immediate hurry as to your decision; to-morrow, or next day, or even later would do. But the opportunity is too good to be lost. Lord Derwent is not easily moved, and we must take him while he is in the vein. How I should like to see you in uniform, my handsome boy"—Charles involuntarily smiled—"and what fun it will be to witness the rage of that horrid old brute, your noble uncle, when he hears his nephew cited as one of the smartest Lifeguardsmen about town." Here Charles joined heartily in the laugh. "And money, you know, need be no consideration. I have more than I want; and no one to give it to I love half so well. I have no children but you, Charles; and no mother was ever fonder of her son."

There was a tenderness in her manner, and expression, a real maternal tenderness, which was very touching. And her looking exceedingly handsome did not lessen Charles's gratitude.

He expressed his feelings with effusion, but not profusion of thanks. He said little; but it was well said, and Lady Ramsay's voice faltered with emotion, as she replied :

“No more, Charles—no more of that. Why should you thank me for conferring upon myself the greatest pleasure this world has in store for me.”

She then went on, in her usual gay manner, to enumerate all the advantages of a military profession. Lady Ramsay was a skilful advocate when she had a cause at heart.

Charles listened to her arguments, with more pleasure than he had ever done before. Frank's contrary objections suddenly appeared to him trite and frivolous.

His own determination, too, of not accepting money from Lady Ramsay was forgotten, or outweighed, by an overpowering disinclination to follow Frank's advice, because it was Frank's. The man, who had monopolised Isabella all the evening, was clearly incapable of a correct judgment.

Lady Ramsay saw her success, and pursued her advantage. The interest she took in Charles, and all that concerned him, was no doubt very flattering. Indeed, so highly was he gratified, that when she rose, saying it was late, he protested that it was early, and strove to detain her.

“Nonsense, Charles!” said she, laughing, and pulling out his watch. “Will not you believe your own eyes and your own watch?” And she held it up before him. “I shall lose my character if I sit flirting with handsome young Guardsmen, till one in the morning. Come, you must really let me go.”

“First answer me one question,” said Charles, losing all his easiness of manner. “Is your brother—I mean Frank Tyrrell—in love—I mean engaged, to Isabella—I mean the young lady who arrived here to-day?”

With every word he spoke, Charles became more and more embarrassed; and his colour rose higher and higher. Then finishing his speech, with a rapidity which contrasted very comically with the slow hesitation of its commencement: “Not that I have any particular reason for inquiring, of course—mere matter of curiosity, you know.”

However absurd was the sudden change in Charles’s manner—and although Lady Ramsay had generally a very quick perception of the ludicrous—she did not, on this occasion, evince the least symptom of mirth. On the contrary, she replied with great seriousness:

“That young lady, whose name you had such difficulty in remembering, is certainly not engaged to my brother. I should be very sorry if it were so. He likes her, no doubt ; but only as a friend. The fact is, that to be really in love with her appears to me very difficult—not to say impossible. Isabella Romaine is, of all women I ever met with, the least likely to inspire *une grande passion*,” she added, attempting to jest.

“And why, pray ?” exclaimed Charles, abruptly.

“She who cannot feel, seldom inspires. Isabella is one of those women — so very reasonable, so unmoved, as never yet to love, or to be loved.”

Charles’s surprised, perplexed face at length quite upset her gravity. She hurried out of the room, wishing him a “*felicissima notte*,” and not “*une passion malheureuse*.”

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning, Charles was late at breakfast, and very taciturn. In general, his bright, handsome face, his merry laugh, and good-humoured fun, made an agreeable meal of what is commonly the dullest and most tedious one. In the morning, he usually overflowed with spirits; but this morning, he was entirely changed.

Lady Ramsay saw his perturbation; and saw through it. But she abstained from raillery. She was gentle and cordial. In a moment his tea was beside him, and his plate was filled precisely with those things he wanted. Charles ate in silence, wondering whether Lady Ramsay recollected how formerly she and Miss Romaine used to disagree on the subject of field-sports. The former en-

couraged, while the latter disapproved of his excessive passion for them. Every moment he expected Lady Ramsay to comment upon the absence of his shooting costume, but she did not even seem to notice it. The only observation made on the subject was by Arethusa, who, not having received any answer from Charles, to various questions she had addressed to him, informed Aurora, in one of her audible whispers, “that she supposed Mr. Stanly was studying the becomings and the harmonies. But though he might be right in thinking that a dark blue cravat did not suit a green shooting-jacket, he was certainly wrong if he imagined it suited his complexion. For *her* part, *she* had never seen him look *half* so ill.”

Aurora’s white eyebrows were raised in amazement, and she opened her mouth to speak; but thought better of it, and stopped short after a very guttural “Dear!”

The shooting costume was entirely laid aside. Charles seemed to have lost all taste for sport. Yet he was not engrossed by any other project. He, always eager in pursuit of one thing or another, now wandered about the house listless and idle. His careless good

humour gradually fled. In less than a week, after Isabella's arrival, he was an altered being.

This change was most apparent when in Isabella's society. Before her, especially, he was silent and thoughtful. His faculties were as if paralysed. Words, ideas, failed him. This nervousness increased; until at length it became so painful, that he would sometimes leave the room as soon as she entered it. But if, in Isabella's presence, he was reserved and bewildered, in absence she alone absorbed all his thoughts. If, when she was before him, he could hardly see her distinctly, the moment she left him, her image rose up in his mind, clear, and beautiful, and bright. Then her voice saluted his ear, like the soft tones of a distant echo, or like music wafted by the wind. And then he understood her words, and answered them successfully. Indeed, he often marvelled at his own eloquence, and could at times hardly persuade himself that these delightful conversations were the mere creations of fancy.

Lady Ramsay was not slow in perceiving the state of her young friend's mind, but she

dropped no hint of her discovery, and least of all to himself. In conversation with Charles, she carefully avoided any mention of Isabella's name; and strove to amuse and distract him by the variety and piquancy of her anecdotes. She knew exactly what sort of stories were most diverting to Charles. If her fun sometimes bordered upon indecorum, the hearer was not obliged to understand more than he pleased; and whether she knew the full meaning of her words or not, it was impossible, from her manner, to divine. Charles was himself again, when alone with Lady Ramsay; he then chatted away in his old easy strain. And it must be confessed, that Lady Ramsay was very skilful in drawing him out, and thus putting him in conceit with himself; thereby producing a sort of excitement bordering upon fascination. But no sooner was her back turned, than the temporary intoxication vanished, and he almost forgot her existence.

It was impossible to appear more satisfied or suave than Lady Ramsay did at the present moment; but she was far from feeling so. A hundred circumstances occurred daily

which could not but be annoying to her; most so of all, was Charles's pertinacious disinclination to out-door amusements. He had almost given up his favourite exercise of riding. When Lady Ramsay asked him to accompany her, there was always some good reason why he must stay at home. On one occasion, he had letters to write; on another, his horse had cast a shoe, or required mashes. Then Soliman's shoulder was rubbed—it was impossible to ride him in that state. Lady Ramsay looked, and could see no traces of rubbing; but her visual organs were suddenly cleared by an angry ejaculation from Charles, and she immediately evinced extraordinary compassion for poor Soliman's injury.

But if Lady Ramsay saw at pleasure, she could also be conveniently blind. She was blind to many an appealing look, which Charles directed towards her, whenever riding became the subject of conversation. She was also deaf to Charles's observations, that, as Miss Romaine was fond of riding, but afraid of a spirited horse, Lady Ramsay's Brown Bess would be exactly the thing for her.

Hitherto the only horse which Charles had

condescended to mount, was Soliman, a perfect goer, but often very unmanageable. A little training would soon have rendered this spirited thorough-bred more docile; but Charles resisted all Lady Ramsay's entreaties to that effect. He declared that he hated nothing so much as a tame brute; and that he had no pleasure in riding, unless the horse gave him something to do. Accordingly, the animal was appropriated to his use; and Charles daily enjoyed the satisfaction of showing off his masterly horsemanship.

Such had been Charles's sentiments up to the period of Miss Romaine's arrival; but not very long afterwards, he discovered that Soliman was getting quite too troublesome, absolutely vicious—in fact, that he was dangerous to ride, and had never been properly broken in.

This task Charles forthwith undertook. Every morning he spent several hours in the riding-school. The ladies frequently assembled there to witness his feats of horsemanship, which were truly admirable.

Soliman was soon pronounced to be perfectly tractable and gentle. Miss Romaine

was requested to try him. She did so, approved of his docility, and was not deficient in praise of Charles's skill, and still more of his kindness.

For he gave up Soliman to her, and rode by her side upon a little scrubby pony, which he had previously despised. Long rides were taken every afternoon. By means of this exhilarating exercise, Charles managed occasionally to get over his shyness. Once or twice he was able to make himself really agreeable; and he began to fancy that Isabella thought so.

Frank could not be blind to what was going on before his eyes. He saw the impression produced upon Charles by Isabella; but he hardly knew whether to regret or rejoice at it. He felt that Isabella's guidance might be of the utmost importance to Charles, as counteracting his sister's dangerous influence. He knew that Isabella's clear good sense would at once perceive and prescribe the line of conduct most advantageous to Charles. And he also knew that she was sincere enough to tell him her mind on the subject. Yet, somehow, he did not feel satis-

fied. Frank, generally so clear in his views, did not in this instance, and almost for the first time in his life, see his way distinctly.

He misdoubted his judgment; because he was aware that in this case, it was impossible for him to be an impartial judge. He knew that his feelings towards Isabella must, more or less, bias him. She had been his idol from infancy; for him, the world did not contain her like. The worship had grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength. The blind faith of childhood had matured into deliberate conviction. The boy felt, and the man knew, that to win her, would be to win the sum of all human felicity.

Isabella had a sincere friendship for Frank, consulted him on all important occasions, and generally followed his advice. Her trust was entire; but there were moments when he wished this trust less entire, for he knew that it was the easy confidence of a sister. He felt that if she had loved him more, she would have trusted him less. Friendship confides of its own free will, but love has no power to withhold: "*Ou confie son secret à l'amitié, mais il échappe à l'amour.*"

Frank gave up all idea of going to London for the present. He determined to wait, and watch; he could not tear himself so soon from Miss Romaine's society. Moreover, he felt, proudly, that the more she saw of him the more he must rise in her esteem. Frank's consciousness of his own self-won independence naturally gave him hopes of converting Isabella's friendship into a higher, and a holier feeling.

One rainy afternoon, Lady Ramsay suddenly entered the drawing-room. She started with surprise at seeing Miss Romaine seated at the piano, and Charles standing beside her, singing to her accompaniment.

"Wonders will never cease," said Lady Ramsay, with a short laugh. "I thought Miss Romaine disapproved of indifferent music. Now, though I am, of course, anxious to be civil to Charles, I really cannot compliment him upon his musical genius."

Charles turned very red, and answered, with much confusion, "Miss Romaine was only trying to teach me a little song, which is quite simple and easy."

“Miss Romaine’s ears are, fortunately, less fastidious than mine.—Poor Charles!” she added, good-naturedly; “it is a horrid shame to laugh at you, for you really are fond of music, in your way; but nature has given you a tolerable ear, with an intolerable voice.”

“Come, Lady Ramsay,” said Charles, gaining courage from her smile, “I declare that is too bad. I assure you, that before you came in, I sung this air very nearly right; and I shall soon get it up in a way that will surprise you.”

“I’m sure you practise it enough,” cried little Chloe, who, unperceived, had danced into the room after Lady Ramsay. “Isabella does nothing, all day long, but play the accompaniment with one hand and the melody with the other. I’m quite tired of hearing it.”

“I admire her patience,” said Lady Ramsay.

“I only wish I were a better pupil,” said Charles. “But, Miss Chloe,” he added, turning towards the child, “what business have you to betray my secrets? I don’t want anybody to know how often I repeat my songs.”

“And what business have you to keep Isabella away from Chloe? I don’t want anybody to do it, and I don’t like you for it.” Her large, dark eyes seemed to change colour, as she looked at him with a strange, indefinable expression.

“Come here to me, Chloe,” said Isabella.

“No, I won’t!” screamed the child. “I won’t come to you, and I won’t kiss you, and I won’t love you any more, for you don’t love Chloe now—you only love *him*.” As she spoke, she pointed contemptuously at Charles with her fore-finger, and going up to Lady Ramsay, she began petting and coaxing her.

Isabella strove to hide her confusion, by turning over the pages of the music before her.

Charles walked towards the window, perseveringly whistling his tune. “There is something particularly light and exhilarating in the air to-day,” he said.

“There is no accounting for tastes,” retorted Lady Ramsay, sarcastically. “I cannot say that I have any particular predilection for wet weather.”

“Wet weather! By Jove, so it is! How

very odd that I should not have been aware of it!"

"It has been pouring all day, and blowing a hurricane into the bargain; but it seems you were too well employed either to see or to hear; so I suppose I may take myself off—I hate being *de trop*. I *did* come with the intention of asking you to read to us, as we can't go out; but it would be a sin to interrupt your harmonious employment."

"My dear Lady Ramsay," exclaimed Charles, heedless of her taunts, for his spirits were at that moment too high to be annoyed by anything, "I shall be delighted to read, or to do whatever else you please."

"But perhaps Miss Romaine does not like to be read to," said Lady Ramsay, turning from him, and stiffly addressing Isabella.

"There is nothing I like better," replied Isabella.

"Then, if you please, we will adjourn to the boudoir. The rest of the party are already there."

The book which Lady Ramsay had chosen for their morning's entertainment, was a French novel, just come out. She knew that

Charles liked reading French, and that he did it remarkably well.

It was a love tale, whose chief merit lay in the exquisite beauty and harmony of the language. Of its merits, as a story, the reader may judge.

The heroine is a lady, or rather an angel, of beauty, purity, and genius. Her husband is very old, but she adores him, although she is all the time sighing for a young lover. The old husband, good man, concurs in so natural a desire, but, unhappily, their joint efforts to find a suitable person prove ineffectual, and the lady, afflicted with vapours, is, by her physician, advised to travel. She sets out alone, upon a voyage of discovery, and has the good fortune to stumble upon a young man, whom she instantly recognises as the beloved unknown. She forthwith initiates him into the peculiarities of her situation; and ends by telling him, with touching naïveté, that he is the identical being for whom she has long pined, and with whom it is her purpose to fall in love. The gentleman, as in duty bound, responds to her affection. His rapture is intense, and its effects peculiar, for he im-

mediately “ceases to be a man, and becomes a living hymn.” Then he requests permission to bathe in the lady’s tears, and she gratifies him by singing Old Robin Grey.

The hero is universally gifted. We are informed, that if he *had* any talent he would have had it to perfection. Unfortunately, he does not seem to have been favoured by nature. Why, the author does not think fit to tell us. The lady, at all events, is satisfied that she has found her ideal. Accordingly, she wanders with him in the woods all day, and converses with him all night; but always through the chink of a door. This mode of love-making is novel—some people might think it inconvenient—but there is no accounting for tastes. Of course, natures so sublime are not affected by vulgar prejudices about right or wrong; but it appears that the lady has a complaint in her heart, and that she has been warned by her physician to avoid any extraordinary excitement. Therefore, and only therefore, the door is never opened.

Virtue so stupendous deserves reward. One day, the lady informs her lover that she wishes

to die, and generously permits him to expire with her. He expresses himself duly grateful, and as it fortunately happens that a lake is close by, they instantly prepare to plunge into it. For this purpose they take a coil of rope, which lies handy, and twist it exactly nine times round their bodies. Thus bound together, they anticipate the beatitude of drowning; when, from excess of rapture, the lady faints, and the lover, considerately, postpones the ceremony. She recovers, thinks no more about dying, and the pair go comfortably home together, and resume their innocent pastimes. These seem chiefly to consist in combing one another's hair with their fingers, and staring each other out of countenance. On one occasion, he improves her mind by reading choice bits of Rousseau's confessions. Such delicacy and refinement are delightful.

Winter arrives, and the lady must return to Paris, and her old husband. She is soon followed by her lover. The husband is naturally delighted by his wife's choice, and finding that the young gentleman's education has been much neglected, he kindly undertakes to improve his understanding. The teacher is

zealous, and the pupil industrious; in the short space of six months, he has learnt everything. Philosophy, history, poetry—nothing comes amiss. It is edifying to behold the beautiful harmony in which these three delectable beings pass their life. Indeed, the only cause for interruption is the necessity for concluding the story. It must end somehow; so the heroine dies, and both husband and lover are reduced to despair. For their mutual comfort and consolation, the elder gentleman proposes to adopt the younger. Why this kind offer is declined, the author does not condescend to explain. Indeed, throughout the whole work, he maintains a lofty independence of probability. Causes and effects, motives and actions are quite free of each other, and, disdaining precedence, fraternise in beautiful equality. A wholesome spirit of freedom pervades the book—that is, freedom from common decency and common sense.

There was a general silence when Charles had finished reading. Everybody felt that sort of unsatisfactory feeling which immoral books always produce upon the reader; though

they are often puzzled to explain the cause of their discomfort.

Charles had observed Lady Ramsay's eyes rest several times approvingly upon him while he had been reading. Her tact prompted her rightly, and she always praised at the proper place. Nothing is so gratifying as well-directed approbation.

"Thank you, Charles," said Lady Ramsay. "You have given us a very agreeable afternoon."

"You are very good to say so," he replied, addressing himself to Lady Ramsay, but looking towards Miss Romaine.

"I am very fond of being read to while I work," lisped Mrs. Tyrrell, yawning, and arranging her dress. "It forms quite a pleasing accompaniment, and I always think my work looks better afterwards."

"I'm so sorry it is done!" exclaimed Aurora. "I should like to hear it all over again."

"So exciting!" sobbed Arethusa. "I'm not only overcome, but overwhelmed." And she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and tried to be hysterical.

“It is interesting, certainly,” said Lady Ramsay. “But very strange, and not particularly fit for young ladies.” She gave her peculiar look and laugh.

“If you think so, why did you have it read?” inquired Frank, abruptly.

“Dear!” said Aurora, alarmed, “I never should have found that out. The people are all so good, and so happy together. I see no harm in it.”

“It may be absurd, but I really don’t know what it all means,” chirped Madame Rodostomus.

“What’s the use of understanding?” said Mrs. Tyrrell. “I never try to understand needlessly.”

“Oh!” sighed Arethusa, “that part where they’re going to drown themselves, because they’re so happy, is dreadfully delicious!”

“Do French people drown themselves when they’re happy, I want to know?” asked little Chloe, sharply. The child had been sitting close to her sister, busily drawing, while the reading was going on.

“Not in general, I believe,” said Frank, smiling.

“Then why are they made to want to do it in the book?”

“You are quite right, my little woman,” replied Frank. “The story is a tissue of nonsense from beginning to end. A good specimen of that class of books, shockingly immoral, because utterly unnatural.”

“Good Heavens, Frank!” exclaimed Lady Ramsay. “There’s not an improper word from beginning to end!”

“So much the worse. For the ideas are all improper. The sentiments are false, and so are the situations. Untruth is the worst kind of immorality. I should like to burn all such books, and break the types from which they were printed.”

“What does Miss Romaine think of the story?” inquired Charles, timidly glancing towards her.

“I am hardly a fair judge,” she replied, very gently. “The language is polished and harmonious; but I am afraid I did not attend very much to the story.”

“You seemed all attention,” said Arethusa, pointedly. “All the time Mr. Stanly was reading, you never took your eyes off him.”

Isabella coloured slightly. But her words were calm.

“Stories of that kind seldom interest me.”

“Love stories, you mean. Well, I believe you. You do not care for them *et pour cause*,” said Lady Ramsay, again giving her peculiar laugh.

“Isabella is superior to such trash,” observed Frank.

“Oh, no—not superior. I simply do not like that kind of book.”

“But you like *some* works of fiction,” pleaded Charles. “You used, I remember well, to delight in the Arabian Nights. You told me yesterday that you thought no book equal to Don Quixote. Shakspeare you knew by heart; and this morning, I saw you reading Ariosto.”

“Oh, yes; but that is quite another thing. Fiction may contain deep truth. Don Quixote is a touching satire, applicable in every age, and in every time; an exquisite combination of pathos and humour, inferior in that style only to the divine comedy of Dante. Of Shakspeare, the world has judged. Not to feel his poetry, is to be de-

prived of the sense of beauty in nature and in art. And as to the Arabian Nights, and Ariosto; they are supernatural indeed, but not unnatural. Ariosto's fictions are so contrived, as to persuade the reader of their reality. Fiction is not falsehood. To the ideal world he has created, Ariosto always remains true. But the French novelist gives us falsehood without fiction. He professes to paint the scenes of real life; but what he presumes to call nature is but a vile and worthless counterfeit. He presents to our view only the distorted phantasies of an over-heated imagination, of a perverted intellect, and of a depraved heart. The scenery is extravagant, the figures monstrous. And the glowing colours with which he paints, the high varnish he uses, only serve, I think, to throw out his false drawing in stronger relief."

Isabella spoke with a fervid, yet gentle enthusiasm, peculiar to herself. But the faint glow which it called into her cheeks soon passed away, and she stood leaning against the mantelpiece lost in thought. A pale sunbeam, studded with prismatic rain-drops, played as a halo round her brow, enhancing

the spiritual character of her statue-like beauty.

Charles's eyes fixed themselves upon her, with an expression not to be mistaken. Lady Ramsay read its meaning.

"Such fine-drawn definitions are quite beyond my poor capacity," she said, with ill-suppressed irritation. "I cannot split hairs. Miss Romaine will be shocked at my vulgarity, when I quote the proverb about a distinction without a difference."

"Oh, Fanny!" exclaimed Frank.

"But really, Lady Ramsay," put in Charles, "I must confess that, as it seems to me, Miss Romaine has clearly—to my mind at least——"

"Oh, I never doubted your championship in *that* cause; and I admire it as it deserves. I applaud the preux chevalier, who stands by his lady, right or wrong. For my part, I am not ashamed to confess my gross ignorance of literary anatomy. I like to enjoy, not to dissect. Others may reason—let me feel."

"Reason and feeling ~~being~~, of course, incompatible," said Frank, drily.

Lady Ramsay made an effort to laugh, but

it was evidently against the grain. After a few moments, however, she succeeded in conquering some unpleasant feelings, with which she appeared to have been struggling, and said, nearly in her usual manner :

“ We have been very dull ever since Miss Romaine’s arrival. It is not using her well. As soon as this bad weather ceases, we must get up some party. What shall it be, Charles ? You shall decide.”

Charles looked wistfully at Isabella. “ Did you ever see a steeple-chase ?” he inquired.

“ No, I never did,” she replied. “ But I am hardly, I fear, worthy of it. It is a dangerous amusement, and I see no merit in useless danger.”

Charles looked disappointed. “ Or a regatta ?” he said, timidly.

“ I never saw a regatta,” Isabella replied. “ It must be a pretty sight.”

“ After all,” said Charles, “ it would not do to have another steeple-chase so soon after the last one. A boat-race would be much better.”

“ I hope you will be more successful than you were last time,” said Arethusa, tauntingly.

“We shall see, Miss Arethusa,” replied Charles.

“I dare say he will do very well indeed,” said Aurora. “Last time, he was out of practice; but he will practice now, I make no doubt; and there is nothing so good for improvement as practice, you know.”

“I thought Mr. Stanly did not care for frivolous amusements; but he has changed his mind within the last fortnight, it seems,” said Arethusa.

“People do sometimes change their minds. I don’t see why they shouldn’t——”

“And their complexions too,” said Arethusa, in her audible under tone. “Mr. Stanly was pale a minute ago, and now he is quite blooming.”

“Well, I’m sure it’s not unbecoming,” said Aurora, putting up her eye-glass.

“Miss Romaine is of your opinion. She has adopted Mr. Stanly’s colour,” said Arethusa.

“I wish,” said Charles, turning upon Arethusa, “that some people would adopt better manners.”

“And I wish others would set them the example.”

“Now, pray don’t quarrel,” laughed Lady Ramsay. “It has been one of my most difficult tasks through life, to keep the peace between you two.”

“Well, then, Lady Ramsay,” said Charles, “it is settled that we are to have a boat-race.”

“*Va pour la course aux bateaux*,” replied Lady Ramsay, as she left the room.

The rest of the party followed her. Isabella remained a moment behind; to help Chloe to gather up the scraps of paper upon which she had been drawing.

When he had reached the door, Charles looked round, and seeing her still sitting upon the sofa, came quickly back, and said, in a low voice, “You *really* like boat-races, Miss Romaine?”

There was not much in the words, but a great deal of meaning was conveyed in the manner in which they were uttered. Isabella’s face and throat were one deep crimson. It was a simple question, but somehow Miss

Romayne was at a loss to find an answer to it. While she was hesitating, little Chloe pushed herself between Charles and Isabella. "Go away," she said, to the former. "This is Chloe's place. What business have you to come so near my sister? Go away, will you?" And she threw her arms passionately round Isabella, who was not sorry to be thus relieved from her confusion.

CHAPTER VI.

“Now, Lady Ramsay,” said Charles, when he joined the ladies, after dinner, “you shall hear what I can do. Prepare yourself to be amazed by my proficiency in singing. Will you accompany me, Miss Romaine?” he added, turning towards the latter.

Charles was radiant with spirits. Since his arrival at Eastrow he had never appeared so gay. His manner that evening was very different from what it had been on the preceding one.

Miss Romaine went to the piano. Charles followed her. Their beginning, it must be confessed, was not successful. Isabella played a wrong chord—Charles struck a false note. Lady Ramsay’s tragi-comic exclamation of horror was anything but likely to inspire courage.

However, they tried again. This time things went better, or rather, they went well. When Charles was inclined to sing out of tune, Isabella's right hand touched the note which she felt he was going to strike. When he slackened or quickened his time, the accompaniment followed in perfect accord.

"Did you ever think I should sing so well?" exclaimed Charles to Lady Ramsay, with undisguised triumph.

Lady Ramsay laughed; but it was a forced laugh.

"You owe something to Isabella's accompaniment, I've a notion," said Frank. "I don't understand much about music, but she appeared to wander about after your singing very dexterously. Did she not, Fanny?"

"I had no idea," said Lady Ramsay, turning towards Isabella, "that you were so used to accompany singing."

"I am not much used to it," she replied.

"She owes her talent solely and entirely to me," said Charles. "I am the first person she ever accompanied."

"When all other trades fail," said Are-

thusa, tossing her ringlets, "you may turn singing-master."

"I should like none better," retorted Charles, "provided Miss Romaine accompanied me."

"She shan't!" screamed Chloe — "she shall accompany none but Chloe!"

Next day nothing was thought of, or talked about but the boat-race, or the regatta, as Lady Ramsay thought proper to call it. Charles was mad upon the subject. As the time drew near, he even neglected his singing, in order to practice rowing. He was on the water from morning till night.

He rallied Frank unmercifully upon his laziness. "You have no chance of winning, my dear fellow," he continually said to him, "if you do not get yourself a little in wind. My failure last time was all owing to want of practice. It is quite astonishing how one improves with a few days' hard work."

"Since you are such a proficient, I should have no chance against you. I had better not try."

"Oh, that *would* be shabby. No, no; we

cannot allow of any such backing out. You must try your luck with the rest. And if you do not give yourself a fair chance, it is your own fault, and more shame to you."

"Well, we shall see, when the day comes," said Frank, carelessly.

The intervening time was spent in active preparations. Aurora was the happiest of the happy. She had the pleasure of writing all the invitations, and numerous were those issued. Lady Ramsay, who loved a bustle almost as well as her little friend, was delighted with her own arrangements, and therefore, in remarkable good humour. As a signal proof of her extreme suavity, may be noted the fact, that she actually allowed Aurora to send invitations to a certain family named Smith, whom Lady Ramsay jocosely called Aurora's vulgar villa friends. Never before had they been admitted within the aristocratic precincts of the Eastrow domains.

Everything was propitious. The weather was splendid. The lawn was covered with tents and marquees. The collation was elegant and profuse. Lady Ramsay was charmed with the success of her arrange-

ments. In fact, nothing could be better done. She was quite in her element, as she graciously received her guests, with a flattering word, or a caressing smile to each.

The lawn presented an animated spectacle. It was crowded with gaily-dressed ladies. The gentlemen, too, had done their best to appear advantageously. The rowers, especially, vied with each other in the taste and appropriateness of their costume. Some of these were expensive and elaborate. There were Greek sailors, and Turkish sailors; there were French and English, Russian and Neapolitan seamen. Charles's dress was, at once, the most simple and most picturesque. His tall, slight, but very athletic figure, was well set off by a loose jacket and trousers, and a red sash tied tight round his waist. A red worsted cap, placed on one side of his head, was, by all the ladies, declared to be particularly becoming.

When all the party had arrived, the rowers mustered, and descended, in a body, to the beach. The ladies crowded upon the terrace, which commanded it. The terrace was at the extremity of the lawn, opposite the house.

It was terminated by a precipitous cliff. The sea washed its base.

“Where’s that lazy Frank?” exclaimed Charles, running back to the terrace. “By Jove! it is too bad to throw us over at the last moment. Has anybody seen Frank?”

Nobody had seen him. He had not yet appeared upon the lawn. Charles was hurrying to the castle in search of him, when he came, walking leisurely from the house.

“My dear fellow, how can you keep us all waiting in this manner?”

“I am sorry you waited. I had a letter of importance to write; and business, you know, comes before pleasure.”

“But you will have no choice of boats, or oars, or anything. Could not you write your letter afterwards?”

“If I have lost my chance, I cannot help it. I really do not care about the match. I had just as soon be a spectator, as a performer.”

“No, that won’t do; that is not fair. To back out, because you can’t get the best boat, is shabby.”

“That, I am sure, was not his reason,”

said Isabella, who had overheard the conversation.

“Thank you, Isabella, for taking my part. But I believe I am getting too old for such foolery.”

“Nonsense, Frank; we want you; we can’t do without you. Our number is not complete—your refusal spoils the whole thing.”

“Oh! if that is the case, here I am, quite willing and ready.”

The friends descended together to the scene of action. There, all was noise and bustle. The sea was alive with boats. Gay streamers floated in the air. White sails glistened, like burnished silver, in the sun. In a few minutes, all was in readiness.

“I want to get into one of the boats—I *will* get into one of the boats,” screamed little Chloe, who had run down the bank after Charles and Frank.

“I am afraid that cannot be allowed,” said Frank, good humouredly, “so go back again to the terrace, like a good little girl.” He got into his boat, and pushed off from the shore.

“But *you* will take me. Won’t you take

me? You *shall* take me; I *will* go," persisted the child, clinging to Charles.

"Now, pray Chloe, don't be tiresome—leave me alone, or I'll tell your sister of you," he added, pushing her away. She had seized hold of the end of his scarf, and, to his no small annoyance, somewhat discomposed the artistic style of its arrangement.

The boats were now drawn up, side by side, in front of the lawn. There was one man in each boat, and each man had a pair of oars. Before starting, they all waved their hats to the ladies above. Great was the universal excitement among the fair spectators.

The race begun. Handkerchiefs waved. Cries rent the air. All the gentlemen showed great skill and dexterity. It was a difficult race. Charles had insisted that it should be so. There was a very awkward turn, which he could not be induced to give up, and in consequence of which, several gentlemen had declined rowing. But Charles had set his heart upon accomplishing the feat in Isabella's presence.

His boat was soon far ahead of the others. His competitors struggled hard to come up

with him. But during the first half of the race, not one neared him.

He caught a distant glimpse of Isabella's bonnet, and he pictured to himself the mild face underneath it, animated with excitement at his success. "If I could but distance them altogether!" thought he. He put forth all his strength, and his boat shot forward like an arrow.

A shout of applause from above renewed his vigour. The gentlemen gave up their bets. They were all convinced that he must win. The ladies protested that he had won already. Their wishes were unanimously favourable to Charles.

Lady Ramsay was in ecstasies. Aurora jumped for joy. Arethusa tried to be hysterical. Isabella alone said nothing. She was standing a little apart from the rest, leaning upon the parapet, which overlooked the sea.

Charles redoubled his exertions. But he had overrated his strength. He felt that it was getting exhausted; and now came the difficult turn. He had set his heart upon accomplishing it brilliantly.

But he turned too sharp. To keep his boat steady, he was obliged somewhat to deviate from the prescribed tract. A rock was between him and it, which it was necessary to avoid. He righted himself skilfully, but he lost time. Several of his competitors were even with him.

To distance, was now out of the question; but he might yet win the single stakes. He rowed hard, but he had become flurried; he lost his self-command. A boat had passed him.

There was a possibility of losing. His anxiety to win robbed him of his strength. It was especially provoking. The boat which had passed his, was Frank's, and a slow one. But it kept steady, and straight as a line, to its right course.

Another fruitless effort, and Charles's strength was quite spent. He threw down his oars, let his boat float at random, and gave up the contest in despair. The slow, steady boat had won the prize. Loud cheers hailed the winner.

As usual, the popular tide turned with victory. The men declared that they had all along, foreseen the result. The ladies dis-

covered that they had from the beginning, wished success to Mr. Tyrrell.

Frank was overwhelmed with compliments. Everybody crowded round him, when he appeared upon the lawn. Everybody but Isabella. As soon as she perceived that all were occupied with Frank, she strolled alone, to the further extremity of the terrace.

She arrived there, just in time to meet Charles, who was the last to ascend the cliff. He looked hot, and jaded, and terribly out of sorts.

Isabella's calm smile increased his irritation, and he was hurrying impatiently past her.

"How can you let such a trifle annoy you, Mr. Stanly?" she said, gently.

"Oh, Miss Romaine! I don't care for losing the race, but it provokes one to have lost it before you."

"Do you think yourself less estimable, because you happened to turn a corner a little too sharply?"

"Yes, that was it," said Charles, recovering himself a little. "That one moment lost me. Just come here, Miss Romaine, and I will show you exactly how it was."

And he began explaining the various causes of his failure, with an interest which she seemed thoroughly to partake.

“Come, Isabella,” said Frank, joining them. “Will you not have some refreshment? All the ladies are at luncheon. My sister sent me to fetch you.”

“I must congratulate you upon your prowess,” said Charles, in a constrained manner. “I had no idea you were such an expert rower.”

“I was myself hardly aware of my own proficiency in that noble calling,” Frank replied, laughing carelessly.

“How nicely you must have calculated your distance, and how accurately you must have measured your strength,” harped Charles.

“I assure you I did neither one nor the other. It was a matter of indifference to me whether I came in first or not.”

“Considering your apathy, you seemed to me to take extreme pains.”

“As I was about it, I thought I might as well do my best; but if I had had any notion that you would take the thing so much to heart, I——”

“Take it to heart,” Charles interrupted.

“No, I’m not quite such a fool as that either,” he added, with ill-suppressed irritation. “You might really do me a little more justice; and the importance you attach to the whole thing is——” But he did not finish his sentence. A peculiar expression he observed in Isabella’s eye, checked whatever words he was going to add. He reddened to the roots of his hair, and turned away, looking very foolish.

Frank felt greatly inclined to laugh. He restrained himself, however, not to increase Charles’s annoyance, and repeated his invitation for Isabella to come to luncheon.

She told him to go on first, and that she would follow. Frank understood that her intention was to say a consolatory or an admonitory word to Charles, and did as she told him. Isabella turned towards Charles, and was about to speak, when a piercing shriek escaped her.

Charles looked round in amazement.

“Oh, God! my sister,” Isabella repeated in tones of agony. “Oh, Chloe! my poor Chloe!”

For an instant, Charles was lost in her deep gaze of anguish and appeal. The next, his

eye glanced in the direction to which she pointed. On the surface of the water lay the broad Tuscan hat, with its gay ribbons, which Chloe had worn that day. It was a piteous sight to behold it, tossed recklessly from billow to billow. A small fair hand glistened in the sunshine, and then the waves closed over it. A faint ripple marked the spot when it had disappeared.

No help was at hand. When the race was over, both gentlemen and sailors had left their boats, and were now dispersed in groups, outside the tents. The paths which led down to the beach were steep and circuitous. To descend by these, was clearly useless. Assistance would arrive too late. The high tide laved the basement of the cliff; the water was fifteen feet below the parapet. It was a dangerous leap.

Charles measured the distance with his eye, sprang upon the wall, and plunged into the deep.

His decision had been prompt, and its execution immediate; but Isabella guessed his purpose. She had read it in his looks, and her hand was upon his arm to stay him. But the soft touch infused unwonted daring.

Wild-fire ran through his veins. All sense of danger was annihilated. He could have braved a thousand deaths.

The ladies, attracted to the terrace by Isabella's cry, screamed and roared, and rushed towards the parapet. The men ran headlong down the cliff. Long before any of them reached the beach, Charles was on shore ; and Chloe in his arms.

Isabella had seen him plunge into the water, and her eye was steady. Her cheek remained unblanched as he rose, and sunk, and rose again. She was heedless of the frantic exclamations which echoed round her. She was deaf to sound ; but her sight was clear. All her senses were fused into one. In the distance she plainly marked the expression of his eyes, as from the water, he glanced upwards towards her. Once more she saw him dive, and rise. But this time a bundle was in one arm. With the other, he swam gallantly ashore. Cries of exultation rent the air. Isabella heard them not ; she grew sick and giddy, and the blood crept coldly along her veins. But through the mist, which dimmed her sight, she saw one bright speck. First defined, and vivid, like an illumined picture

upon the wall, it rose upwards, and spread larger and misty. And now she saw no more. Her heart was of ice. She seemed turned to stone.

Charles scaled the cliff by a steep, short cut; avoided the crowd of men, whose assistance he had rendered vain; threaded his way through the wondering women, who obstructed his path; and rushed forwards to Isabella. He fell upon his knees, as before an idol; and held up, like an offering, the fainting child.

A stifled sob escaped Isabella. The marble was melted now. She looked towards heaven, and pressed her hands upon her bosom. Then, covering her face with them, she burst into tears.

“My own Chloe! and only to think of it!” screamed Madame Rodostomus, forcing her way through the crowd. “Why on earth did you do it? I can’t think what put it into your head. My luck, of course—all my bad luck.”

As it may be supposed, Chloe, being still insensible, made no immediate reply to her mother’s reiterated queries.

Meanwhile, Frank had not been idle. As soon as he saw Charles plunge into the sea,

he knew that he could be of no use, either to him, or to Chloe. He therefore occupied himself with those near him. He dashed water into Lady Ramsay's face—she was in real hysterics—poured some down Arethusa's throat, who was trying hard to get up a second-hand imitation; peremptorily begged the ladies to restrain their very feminine and very useless ejaculations; and reached the terrace just as Isabella had dried her tears. Then, lifting Chloe out of Charles's arms, he carried her into the house.

Isabella hurried after him. Aurora was in the hall, surrounded by the servants, and spouting receipts and nostrums, but preparing none, and giving so many simultaneous and contradictory orders, that it was utterly impossible to execute any. She looked, however, so eager and so earnest, that neither Isabella nor Frank could find it in their hearts, to chide her for the very impedimentary nature of her services.

Hot water was procured, and other restoratives applied. Fortunately, Madame Rodostomus had been long detained on her passage from the terrace to the house, had so many extraordinary adventures to relate, and got so

inextricably perplexed between the ways of Providence and her own disastrous ill-luck, that she could not manage to reach the room where Chloe was deposited, till the child had nearly recovered.

Just as Madame Rodostomus entered, Chloe opened her large, wondering eyes. “*Madre mia!*” she murmured, in soft Italian, and held out her little arms.

“Now don’t, my dear—pray don’t. I won’t have it,” screamed the old lady; “I can’t bear it—it’s too much for me. I have not heard you say those words since you, as a baby, lay dead of the croup; and it made me cry so dreadfully, that I was quite ill; indeed, I never altogether recovered it, and—— Bless me, Chloe, how perverse you are! Can’t you be cross?—can’t you scold a little, just to please me?” Sobs impeded the old lady’s utterance.

Chloe was now able to recollect, and relate what had taken place. It seemed that she, in a rage at Charles’s refusal to take her with him, had run a long way along the coast. She came, by chance, upon an old boat, just afloat, and tied loosely to a rotten post. Chloe, strong and hardy, soon disengaged it,

and fearlessly trusted herself to the waters: Her plan was, suddenly to appear among the racers, and by surprising, disconcert them. In order not to be seen till the right moment, she kept close to the shore, that she might be shielded from view, by the shadows projected by the rocky cliff. But when she arrived, the races were over, and everybody gone. She flew into a passion, gave her crazy boat an impetuous shove with the oar, upset it, and fell into the water.

Charles was the hero of the evening. Madame Rodostomus's gratitude was tremendous. There was only one drawback to her happiness, she declared; neither of her children had done it; and if they had been boys, she was sure they would; but—just like her luck—they were not boys, and never could be.

Mrs. Tyrrell struggled to comprehend this position; and forgot her braids and her sleeves in her admiration for Charles. Arethusa strung superlatives together in his honour; and Aurora was nervous and guttural to an extraordinary degree.

Lady Ramsay looked pale, and out of spirits. Her hysterical attack had been violent; she seemed hardly recovered from it.

But she smiled fondly and proudly upon “her dear boy.”

Isabella had remained up-stairs with her sister. It was not till late in the evening that she appeared, holding the little girl by the hand. Charles rose, and went towards her. Their eyes met. In silence, he led her to a seat.

Chloe was pale, and languid. She went kindly up to Lady Ramsay. “Are you better?” she said, in soft, broken English. “I heard you were ill—I hope you are better.”

Lady Ramsay fondly caressed her little pet. “And you, my pretty creature, how are you? Have you recovered your fright?”

“Chloe was not frightened—Chloe is never frightened.” Her eyes flashed scornfully.

“You little heroine! But do you know, that a moment more, and it would have been too late to save you? When Charles first took you out of the water, he thought you were really dead. He never in his life was so happy as when he saw you open your eyes, as you lay upon the grass, and unconsciously murmur some pretty Italian words. He risked his life nobly to save yours. Go and thank him, my pretty darling.”

A strange expression passed across the child's face as she listened to Lady Ramsay. "No, no, no!" she said, passionately. Her eyes opened wide, and a dark glance shot from them. Then the lids dropped heavily—she seized Lady Ramsay's hand, and kissing it after the Italian fashion, murmured gently, "But I'll thank *you*—I will thank you instead." She turned abruptly away, and took refuge by her sister.

Isabella stooped down, and whispered something in Chloe's ear.

"Oh no, no, don't ask her—please don't. Chloe can't—she won't. Well, if you *will* have it," she added, petulantly.

She then ran up to Charles, who, lost in thought, was standing on the other side of Isabella, and drawing up her little person, said, with an odd sort of spiteful reluctance, "They say you've saved my life. Thank you—I'm very much obliged to you;" and she made him a little short curtsey—"but—I don't like you, for all that."

Having pronounced these last words with especial glee, the child sprang, with one bound, back to her sister, and crouched up

close to her. Charles laughed good humouredly; and presently went to the piano. He did not ask Isabella to accompany him, but, sitting down, struck a few chords, and then began singing a German air.

It was a students' song, of a very peculiar character; at once stirring and impassioned. It was decidedly Charles's best song: he really gave it with great spirit. "Will nobody join the chorus?" he inquired, when he had finished the solo stanzas. Lady Ramsay was tired, and her voice weak. Arethusa, after some unhappy squalls, gave up the attempt. Suddenly, Chloe's voice was raised; thrilling, clear, and true. She could not, of course, sing the German words, but she improvised an Italian stanza, which suited admirably with the spirited, yet pathetic, character of the music. Every one applauded. Lady Ramsay was especially delighted, and asked for an encore. But Chloe would not sing again. She obstinately persisted in maintaining that she had forgotten the words. They had come into her head of themselves, she said, and she could think of no others that suited the melody.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a few days, Miss Foster was to leave the castle, where she had been domesticated for some months, and reside with her father at the rectory. Dr. Foster had been absent, and was shortly to return home. His daughter wished to give a fête upon the occasion.

The fête was to celebrate, not only the worthy Doctor's return, but also the opening of his new house. His hobby was architecture, and the moment he was presented to the living of Eastrow, he pulled down the old rectory to build up a new one.

Dr. Foster was what is called a good man and a good clergyman. He gave alms indiscriminately—therefore he was charitable. His texts were obscure—therefore he was learned. His sermons were lengthy—there-

fore he was pious. In virtue of these merits, five hundred souls were committed to his care.

For the last fortnight, little Aurora had been in a state of restless excitement, difficult to describe. What between the extraordinary honour of receiving her father's guests, among them Mr. Stanly, and a certain consciousness of inferiority in manners and appearances, she had worked herself up into an absolute fever of humble self-importance. Soups, jellies, and the said Mr. Stanly, had engrossed her waking and sleeping dreams, and she was half dead with fatigue from trotting back and forwards from the castle to the rectory.

The important day arrived. Aurora was up with the lark, and at the rectory long before breakfast. She helped the cook to spoil two jellies and a blanc-manger ; she helped the footman to break twelve of the best china plates ; so having put everybody out of temper, and everything out of order, she trudged complacently back to the castle, highly satisfied with her morning's work.

She made a hurried toilet, and surveyed

her little squat person, adorned in the variegated glories of a washed white muslin, a yellow bonnet, a lilac scarf, and a blue sash to match; then nodding to herself in the glass, she muttered half aloud, "Dear! there's no knowing—I certainly look very well—for *me*—and strange things *do* happen sometimes."

Arethusa, in a charming toilet, fresh from London, interrupted these cogitations. "Dearest Aurora!" began the beauty, eagerly, "did you observe how very particular Mr. Stanly's manner was to me last night?"

"Dear! no, I observed nothing," replied poor little Aurora, flushing violently. Somehow, she felt very guilty at the recollection of her own past thoughts.

"Well! I wonder you did not. It was not only particular, but remarkable. He never once spoke to me the whole evening—and when I sang, he never listened to me—now that must mean something, you know."

While the young ladies were wondering and commenting upon the probable and possible causes of this very extraordinary behaviour, they were told that the carriages were ready. Down stairs they went, accordingly. They

found the party assembled upon the door-steps, and Madame Rodostomus holding forth with herself, as to which carriage she should give the preference, an open one, or a close one.

The open carriage was delightful, only she was sure to catch cold. The close carriage was charming, only she was certain to be sick. Once, as a girl, she had been dreadfully sick in a close carriage, and there was no reason why she might not be sick again;—other people might like being sick, she didn't.

“Pray try to make up your mind!” said Mrs. Tyrrell. “Do you not see that you are keeping us all waiting. I make a point of never doing anything so ill-bred.”

“It may be absurd, but I really can't help it,” persisted the widow; “I do not like being sick, nor catching cold neither.”

“It is hardly possible to catch cold on such a day as this,” said Lady Ramsay, good naturedly. “One could hardly catch cold to-day, if one were to try.”

“But why should one try?” observed the literal Aurora. “I think it much better not trying to catch cold.”

“ I think we had much better not stand waiting here all day,” said Mrs. Tyrrell, pettishly smoothing her sleeves. “ If it were not too ill-bred, I should get into the carriage at once.”

“ I think you had better, mamma,” said Lady Ramsay, losing patience. “ If Madame Rodostomus is afraid of both carriages, there is but one alternative—she must stay at home.”

Meanwhile, Isabella had been talking in a low voice, to her mother, and at last the widow, half laughing, half scolding, let her daughter wrap her up in a large cloak, which the latter had provided, and help her into the open carriage, after Mrs. Tyrrell. Arethusa and Aurora followed them, and they drove off.

The next difficulty was with Sir James. He wanted to say or do something, and could not express what he meant ; indeed, he did not himself seem to have any clear idea on the subject. “ Fanny—you know what I mean—eh ? Don’t you think it would be right—but I’ve no money—give me some—how much should it be, eh ?”

Lady Ramsay was utterly at fault. She did not like to let him see it, for she perceived that he was getting very nervous, and very much excited, and she was afraid of contradiction bringing on a fit. Yet she could not comprehend what he wanted, and he was unable to explain. She stood hesitating, and trying from his looks, to make out his meaning. In this perplexity, Charles whispered in her ear,

“Can’t you persuade him to stay at home?”

“Oh no, he has been looking forward to this party for some time. It was only this morning that he told me he wished to go. Oh no, I can’t leave him at home.”

“You know,” persisted Charles, “that he is not able to enjoy the party; if he could, I should be the first to wish him to join it; but he will take no pleasure in it himself, and he will spoil ours. He will be always wanting something, and somebody must be in continual attendance upon him. You had much better persuade him to remain where he is. Sir James,” he added, turning towards the latter, “don’t you think you would be more

comfortable at home? The weather might change—or——”

“No, no, I’m going—I *will* go,” replied Sir James, eagerly; “Fanny, am I not going—I must go, must I not, Miss Romaine? Tell Fanny what I mean—you know!”

“I think,” said Isabella, who had been talking aside to Sir James during the *aparté* between Charles and Lady Ramsay—“I think that Sir James wishes to make a present to Miss Foster, on the occasion of to-day’s fête—a little present of money to buy something for herself—or her school,” she added, following the expression of his countenance, as she spoke.

“Yes, yes, that is it—that is just what I mean,” exclaimed poor Sir James, delighted at having his own idea explained to him. “I wanted to give something—I didn’t know what—she always knows what I mean,” he added, looking with gratitude at Isabella.

“A capital thought,” exclaimed Lady Ramsay. “I’ll go and get the money—ten pounds will do, I suppose?” Sir James nodded assent. “How stupid I must be, not to have thought of it before.”

“How on earth did you find out what he meant,” whispered Charles to Isabella, while Lady Ramsay was absent.

“I know he is always wanting to do something kind, so I made two or three trials at random, till I found out his idea,” she replied, simply.

“Do you read everybody’s ideas as easily?” Charles began. At that moment Lady Ramsay reappeared, and he turned suddenly, and advanced to meet her.

“Here, Sir James—here is the money!” she said, gaily. “Now let us be off, for it is getting late. You, Charles, may either have the pony-carriage, or walk with Frank. But where is Chloe? Where is my pet?”

“Here!” exclaimed Chloe, springing from the top to the bottom of the high flight of steps; “here I am. But Chloe is not going in the carriage—Chloe will walk.” And she was off like a shot.

“What a wild thing it is!” said Lady Ramsay, laughing.

“Too much so,” replied Isabella. “She is difficult to manage, but she has a kind heart. Frank, will you take care of her?” she added, addressing the latter.

Frank nodded acquiescence, and the carriage drove off.

Very comical was the mixture of exultation and trepidation exhibited by Aurora, as she, for the first time in her life, received company in her own house. She floundered and stumbled about in a most disastrous manner. She was always coming in contact with something, or somebody; and her gold chain was always exactly where it should not be. It *would* catch in everybody's dress; it *would* go flop against everybody's face, as its wearer bounced along; and the damage done by it among lace shawls, veils, and scarfs, was lamentable.

Lady Ramsay arrived, all smiles and graciousness. She did the honours, to please her little friend, and to please herself. She wished the party to go off well. Aurora had no idea of *receiving*, and Lady Ramsay excelled in the art. She therefore said and looked civil things innumerable; and had even an amiably patronising word for Aurora's villa friends, who were, of course, all invited.

Charles and Frank arrived last. Little Aurora was much too nervous to inquire the

cause of Mr. Stanly's non-appearance with the rest of the party from the castle; and much too near-sighted to perceive him when he did arrive, until he was close to her. Then she gave a tremendous start, and almost knocked down a fat old gentleman, whose watch-key got inextricably entangled with her chain. She pulled one way, he the other, but in vain; all their joint efforts were ineffectual, and the well-meant assistance of their friends served only to increase the difficulty which they endeavoured to remedy.

In the midst of this dilemma, little Aurora caught distant sounds of the paternal voice. Off she flew, with a violent jerk, and down she fell upon her hands and knees, in an attitude not exactly graceful, with the fat old gentleman on the top of her.

It was impossible to resist laughter. Charles roared, but good-humouredly came forward to assist her, by getting the fat old gentleman upon his legs again. The latter took the matter very seriously, and muttered sundry very British imprecations, to which Aurora replied by scolding herself vehemently for being *so* awkward.

A sad misshaping of the yellow bonnet, and two green patches on the spots where her knees had come in contact with the grass, were soon forgotten in the delight of seeing her beloved father, after several months' absence. Proud and happy indeed was she, as she piloted him, together with the rest of the party, Charles Stanly included, through all the mazes and intricacies of their new abode.

It was an Elizabethan structure, in the full discomfort of the term. Long windows, which admitted little light, and broad chimneys, which afforded no heat, vied with each other in bold defiance of their ostensible purposes. There were staircases communicating with each other, and with nothing else ; there were passages, leading only to fellow - passages. There were odd little rooms, in strange little corners ; queer little flights of steps, upwards and downwards, but answering no possible end or purpose, and completing a whole, most ingeniously uncomfortable. But it was in correct keeping with the age which it represented, and both father and daughter were delighted. Their friends complimented, and they believed.

Aurora's school-children were on the lawn, working away at beef, pudding, and potatoes. The married ladies felt maternal, and the single ladies matrimonial, at the sight of these little innocents ; and their expletives on the occasion were equally vivacious and appropriate.

Luncheon was presently to be served in a tent ; and thither, at the appointed hour, the little hostess led her guests.

But luncheon, alas ! there was none. Smashed jellies, bearing unmistakable finger prints, fragments of pie-crust, innocent of the knife, and crumbling ruins of every sort, kind, and colour, were the only remains of the delicate collation, which, not two hours before, Aurora had contemplated with self-approving satisfaction. Her consternation and dismay can hardly be imagined.

Before she was sufficiently recovered for speech, shrieks of laughter were heard. None but Chloe could laugh so wildly ; and there indeed she was, in a neighbouring field, skipping and flitting about like a will-o'-the-wisp. She was surrounded by Aurora's school-children, gaping, half in mischievous delight,

half in shame, at the exploit into which Chloe had led them. Soon, however, they resumed the occupation, which detection had, for some moments, suspended; and they again fell to devouring various amalgamations of cream, tongue, and salad, with which they had amply provided themselves.

“Oh, Chloe! Chloe!” involuntarily escaped Isabella, and she advanced some steps towards her; but seeing her mother’s face in a broad grin, she presently stopped, sighed, and turned back again. Isabella saw that interference would do more harm than good. In her mother’s presence, nothing could quell the child’s wilful recklessness. She took pleasure in disobedience, for disobedience’ sake. Indeed, so injudicious was the old lady’s management, that this result was hardly to be wondered at. The education poor little Chloe had received was exactly calculated to increase the faults and extinguish the good qualities natural to her. Isabella’s remedies came too late to be effectual. She deeply lamented her sister’s sad training, and her own inability to counteract it. When her mother was out of the way, she had some influence with the

child, who loved her sister dearly, and delighted in pleasing her; but the old lady's appearance invariably reawakened the spirit of rebellion; and Isabella then wisely abstained from interference, lest she should lose what little authority she possessed.

She made the best apology she could to Aurora, who, good little soul, was soon pacified; and by way of consolation, began apologising right and left.

"What can induce people to spoil their children?" whimpered Mrs. Tyrrell; "and I wonder what business children have at parties of this kind."

"If I had only known what was going to happen, I should not have invited pretty Chloe, or, rather, naughty Chloe; but I really did not know that she was going to be so naughty," said Aurora.

"Not that I care about my luncheon. Do not imagine such a thing," resumed Mrs. Tyrrell, wiping her mouth with an elegant pocket-handkerchief. "I should not have eaten it if it had been there, eating is such a plebeian pastime."

"Plebeian or not, I wanted *my* luncheon,"

chirped Madame Rodostomus. "I'm half starved. It may be absurd, but I really can't help it; I do like to eat when I'm hungry."

"So do I," said Aurora, nudging her elbow, as if half ashamed of the disclosure. "But I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll just go into the house, and have tea and bread and butter, which will be better than nothing, you know."

"Bless me, if it is not raining cats and dogs!" screamed Madame Rodostomus; "who would have thought it? Things happen to me that happen to nobody else; we shall have to stay here, soaking in the tent, all day—just my luck!"

"Dear, I'm so sorry," croaked the discomfited Aurora; "and I've got so many things to show you—the dairy, and the poultry-yard, and the flower-garden, and such sweet little pigs! oh dear; but I really do think it will clear up; I almost think it looks lighter already."

"I think nothing of the sort; and I only wonder how people can reconcile it to themselves to give fêtes in bad weather," whined Mrs. Tyrrell.

"I really am so sorry: out-door amusements

do depend very much upon weather, certainly; and if I had only known that it was going to rain, I should have chosen another day, I'm sure; but we can't know everything," Aurora added, with a sigh.

"And my children, they'll both catch cold, of course." Madame Rodostomus was getting more and more excited. "My darlings will be laid up, or something. Miss Foster, you are not a mother!"

"I!" screamed Aurora, alarmed at the idea of such a possibility.

"If you were, you would better understand a mother's feelings. Why it should have rained just to-day! The ways of Providence are unaccountable!"

"And my best bonnet, too; I wish I had not put on my best bonnet!" sighed Mrs. Tyrrell.

"And my hair all out of curl!" groaned Arethusa; "there never was anything so unfortunate."

Poor little Aurora was in despair. She apologised for the mishap of the luncheon, as if she herself had eaten it up. She deplored the inclemency of the weather, as if she had caused it. She hoped that dear Miss Romaine

and pretty Chloe would not catch cold—people did not *always* catch cold when they might. She pitied Mrs. Tyrrell's bonnet, and suggested the possibility of its protection by an umbrella. She consoled Arethusa with the assurance that her hair, even out of curl, was still beautiful hair; and further comforted her with the assurance that it would curl again, as nicely as ever, to-morrow; but all in vain, the ladies' tempers were soured, and Aurora's consolations could not sweeten them.

Lady Ramsay saw her little friend's distress, and came to her assistance. She pacified the old ladies by some well-timed nothings; whispered in Arethusa's ear a compliment which some gentleman had *not* paid her; and having sent for umbrellas, the ladies were enabled to get across the lawn to the house.

Aurora, hoarse with laughter, at the very comical circumstance of having left one of her shoes sticking in a hole, out of which Mr. Smith (one of her villa friends) rescued it, to the everlasting distinction of a new pair of saffron gloves, began bustling about the room, and making a tremendous clatter with cups and saucers.

The comforting ideas suggested by these sounds, improved the general good humour. Each lady imbibed at least three cups of tea, while Dr. Foster pronounced an eulogium upon the merits of that beverage, which he described as highly conducive to the developing of the intellectual powers. This precept he enforced by the example of Dr. Johnson, about whom he related various, not particularly new anecdotes; but which answered his purpose of modestly insinuating that there was a very strong, and a very undeniable resemblance between himself and that great man.

Aurora nodded her head in time to her father's long-winded periods; which were undoubtedly as sententious, if not as sagacious, as those written by his literary model.

But, lo! in the middle of one of his best rounded phrases, little Aurora's face of ecstatic admiration, changed into one of blank despair, and she exclaimed—"Oh, Chloe! Chloe! that is very naughty; it is very wrong to be so naughty!"

The eyes of all the company were directed from the worthy Doctor, to a chair just behind him, upon which Chloe was mounted. She had

been rummaging about the house, and routed out a surplice of the Doctor's, in which she had attired herself. On her head was one of the unconscious divine's best powdered wigs; and there she stood, mimicking his gestures and the tone of his voice so exactly, that it was impossible to resist laughter.

Isabella could not let this pass. Such a piece of impertinence, in the Doctor's own house, must be put a stop to, and she made way towards Chloe; but Chloe was too quick for her. She dived down from her chair, vanished through a door that stood ajar behind her, and shut it just as her sister had reached it.

Isabella turned the handle. The door flew open; it opened outside. "Take care, take care!" burst simultaneously from the Doctor and from his daughter; but the warning came too late. She had slipped down one of those aimless flights of steps, with which this delightful mansion was so ingeniously provided.

A faint scream escaped her. She was nearly insensible with pain. Everybody flew to her assistance; but she was unable to move. She had given her foot a violent strain.

Chloe threw herself upon the ground in despair. "Chloe did not mean it—she didn't; indeed she didn't mean it." The child's distress was so excessive, that Isabella, notwithstanding the pain she was suffering, endeavoured to pacify her; but she would not be comforted, and continued sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I'll give you something to cry for, you naughty, wilful, perverse creature," screamed the widow, as she rushed forward with uplifted hands. But Lady Ramsay interposed.

"Forgive her this time, dear Madame Rodostomus," she said. "Chloe is really not so much to blame as I am. I must confess that it was I put her up to this frolic. I thought we should have a dull afternoon; so I gave her a hint where to find the wig and the surplice, and showed her how she might slip quietly into the room by the side door. I wanted some fun, and could not anticipate so disastrous a dénouement."

"Really, Lady Ramsay," said Charles, in a very angry voice, "I think you might have known better. How could you be so thoughtless? Miss Romaine is seriously injured;

she is suffering agony. Oh, Lady Ramsay, how could you be so inconsiderate !”

Charles spoke these last words in a very angry under tone, as he pushed past Lady Ramsay, in order to offer his assistance to Isabella.

When the latter saw him approach, her cheek, pale as death a moment before, became suffused with the richest crimson ; and though but now, incapable of moving, she rose without much apparent difficulty, when supported by his arm.

“ Fanny ! Fanny ! what is the matter ? What has happened to pretty Isabella ? I can’t bear that anything should harm her—I *cannot*,” said poor Sir James, speaking with unusual coherence. In the general confusion, he could not make out what had taken place.

But Lady Ramsay was unable to reply. Tears stood in her eyes. Charles’s words had given her more pain than she chose to confess even to herself. She knew that his temper was hasty, and that with her he had never been accustomed to put much restraint upon himself. At other times she laughed at his

petulance. Why did it grieve her so deeply to-day?

Charles had placed Isabella upon the sofa, and stood beside her, pouring out lamentations, which she vainly strove to silence. Lady Ramsay's eyes wandered from one to the other, with a look of dissatisfaction such as they seldom expressed. By way of concealing it, she beckoned to Chloe, who rushed impetuously to her, and hid her face in her lap, sobbing out, "Chloe is so sorry; she didn't mean it—she didn't, indeed." Her grief was excessive. Lady Ramsay could not soothe her.

All the ladies were talking and lamenting at once. Poor little Aurora bounced from one to the other, consoling and condoling with all her might.

She consoled one widow with the assurance, that though she was so sorry it all happened in her house, still Miss Romaine might have sprained her foot anywhere else, and would have suffered just as much pain. She condoled with the other widow upon the damage done by the rain to Arethusa's ringlets, as if that was the greatest calamity that could

befal a human being. "But they'll curl again," she added, confidentially.

Aurora, just then, caught a glimpse of her own face in the glass, and gulped down a sigh, as she observed the difference between her own looks and those of her handsome friend. Arethusa's hair was out of curl certainly, but still it was beautiful hair, while her own hung about her ears like matted tow.

She had not, however, much time to make invidious comparisons; for Frank, who had gone to order the carriages, now came to say that they were ready. He and Charles helped Isabella into one of them.

Lady Ramsay followed. A cloud was on her brow, and her words were civil, but cold. She asked Isabella how she felt, and then leant back in the carriage, and remained silent. Gradually, however, her countenance relaxed; for as she watched Isabella, she saw how much and how patiently she was suffering. Pity superseded every other feeling, and her words became kind and even affectionate. Isabella responded gratefully, and the unusual warmth of her manner excited in Lady Ramsay additional solicitude. Before they reached

the castle, all her feelings of displeasure seemed entirely to have vanished.

Every moment she became more solicitous about Isabella. She herself assisted her out of the carriage with the utmost care. Her orders were prompt and judicious. Her own boudoir was to be appropriated to Miss Romaine's use. Its situation, communicating with the drawing-room, was most convenient, and its sofa the most commodious in the house. With her own hands Lady Ramsay assisted in making the necessary preparations. All Isabella's remonstrances were vain. Lady Ramsay's was a peremptory kindness which would take no denial.

Isabella was touched; but, as usual to her, she said little. Her thankfulness was, like a veiled sunbeam, rather felt than seen. But Lady Ramsay perceived it; and her colour heightened, and her bright eye beamed brighter with pleasure. Yet a mist rose and dimmed its lustre, and a hot tear fell upon the hand she held in her own. It was a strange compound, that little tear! A world of emotions, all condensed into one light, limpid drop!

Presently the doctor was announced. Lady

Ramsay told what had happened, and what measures she had taken for her friend's relief. The doctor listened, approved, and proceeded to examine the foot. The foot, he sagely pronounced, was swollen; the swelling was in consequence of the strain. He further informed Miss Romaine that she was in pain, and that he would do his best to assuage it. Meanwhile, she must keep quiet.

But quiet — and Madame Rodostomus ! The idea was preposterous. Before the doctor had been gone five minutes, she had disturbed her daughter at least a dozen times. By way of ministering to her comfort, she gave her excessive annoyance. It was every moment, “Isabella take this,” and “Isabella try that.” “My dear, I hope you will not be lame for life, though of course you will—with my luck; things happen to me that never happen to anybody else, and I never could account for it; and why I only should never be able to go outside the door without sprained ankles, and floods of rain, and clergymen's wigs, and no luncheons, does, I must say, quite pass my comprehension. Certainly the ways of Providence are most inscrutable.”

Isabella let her mother run on. The old lady soon got tired of having all the conversation to herself. She found non-contradiction insufferably wearisome, and she presently went off in search of a less patient listener.

Chloe contradicted to her heart's content. The child was not well, and very angry with herself—consequently, feverish and fractious. She knew that the easiest way of getting rid of her mother was to put her in a rage; and she employed this method with signal success.

Isabella's dinner was served in the boudoir. In the evening, the door was thrown open between it and the drawing-room. Lady Ramsay sat beside Miss Romaine's sofa. But, as usual, their conversation was not animated. They had few ideas in common, and found little to say to one another.

Aurora had remained with her father at the rectory. Everybody felt her loss. On that particular evening especially, her little cheerful common-places would have been universally acceptable. Madame Rodostomus had no one to listen to her chirupy lamentations; Mrs. Tyrrell, no one to arrange or disarrange her worsteds; Arethusa, no one with

whom to talk sentiment ; Lady Ramsay, no one to get her harp ready ; Chloe, no one to quiz. Isabella, Charles, and Frank, were occupied with their own thoughts, and wished for somebody to divert the general attention from themselves. There are cases in which an ordinary person is preferable to a superior one.

During the whole of the evening, Charles could not take his eyes off Isabella. Yet he spoke little to her. There was something in the self-possessed equanimity of her manner which, by repelling familiarity, produced a sort of restraint. But if her features were still, they had deep expression ; if her manner was calm, it was unspeakably earnest. She threw around her, as it were, an atmosphere of peace, which subdued and chastened whatever was harsh and glaring. It was like moonlight upon a landscape.

Charles gazed on her as she lay suffering and uncomplaining, and he thought of her as a "beauty and a mystery ;" he felt as if his fate were linked to hers as to some fair nebulous star, distant, inscrutable, and divine.

Next morning, at breakfast, Lady Ramsay

tossed a letter across the table to Charles. "Read it," she said. "It concerns you more than me."

In its progress across the table, it so happened that the letter bounded into Frank's plate. He saw that the direction was in Lord Derwent's hand. Lady Ramsay's triumphant expression, Charles's flurried look, aroused in Frank certain suspicions, which he determined to take the earliest opportunity of clearing up.

Accordingly, as soon as breakfast was over, he approached his sister. "Fanny," he said, "a letter I received this morning calls me immediately to London. Before I go, I wish to speak to you for a few minutes."

"What can be the cause of all this hurry? And I am so busy! Besides, I must read the newspaper to Sir James, poor dear; he does not follow half I read, but it amuses him somehow, to hear me. So I had better speak to you after luncheon." She tried to escape.

"No, I must speak now. My business in town is important. No time must be lost

about it—and I shall not detain you a moment.”

“ Well, then, speak as we go up-stairs. But pray don’t look so solemn. You quite frighten me.”

“ Nonsense, Fanny! Don’t be childish, but answer me one plain question. Have you been negotiating with Lord Derwent respecting Charles Stanly?”

“ Perhaps I have—and what then?”

“ Lord Derwent is influential in many quarters. In what way do you intend that he shall serve Charles?”

“ Don’t you think a uniform would be very becoming to him?”

“ Oh, Fanny! so you really have done what I so earnestly begged you not to do.”

“ Done!. Why, I have done nothing at all.”

“ Pray do not prevaricate. Charles is easily swayed. You have great influence with him, and if you persuade him to enter the army, you make him an idle man about town, and ruin his prospects for life.”

“ So far from wishing to ruin his prospects

for life, it is my especial desire to improve them."

"Then, what is the object of your negotiation with Lord Derwent?"

"Lord Derwent is kind and obliging, well-disposed towards Charles; he is indeed a most amiable man is Lord Derwent, and it provokes me beyond measure to hear him called cold, and worldly, and rapacious."

"Never mind Lord Derwent's merits or demerits. To the point, Fanny."

"Oh, you thorough going lawyer—won't you believe me when I tell you that there's no point at all. When a gentleman writes to a lady, there seldom is much point in what he says—amiability, and civility, and *dénouement et tout ce qui s'ensuit*. You don't understand women's ways and wiles." She laughed, shook her head at him, and tried to escape, but he detained her.

"This is intolerable," he said, with a tinge of sternness, the only indication of anger he ever showed. "I have put off my journey on purpose to ask you one question, and you will not answer it."

“ Poor old Frank !” she teasingly persevered.

“ Oh, Fanny !” said he, waving her aside, “ tell me once for all. Have you been negotiating with Lord Derwent about getting Charles into the army ?”

“ Well ! yes, and no. Lord Derwent offers a commission ; but Charles has not yet accepted. Will that satisfy you, most precise brother ? Now you know all that I do.” By this time they had reached the landing before Sir James’s door.

“ But,” persisted Frank, “ you surely know, pretty well, what his intention is. Will he accept, or no ?”

“ I can answer for no man’s intentions, in military, any more than in matrimonial affairs.” She laughed, and her hand was upon the lock.

“ He will ask for your advice,” said Frank, holding her back by the arm. “ As you value his happiness, do not hurry him into the army.”

“ I never hurry any one into anything. I never advise until I am asked. And now I

wish you a pleasant journey, and better success, on your next cross-questioning." She blew him a kiss, disengaged her arm, turned the handle of the door, and vanished.

Frank was about to follow her. "No," he said, as if a sudden thought had struck him, "better act for myself. I will see Lord Derwent while I am in London."

He then went to take leave of Isabella. She seemed surprised, and sorry at his sudden departure; but when he told her, that he was called to London, to plead a cause of great importance; and in which, if he succeeded, he was likely to gain much credit, she smiled with pleasure. "I was afraid something disagreeable was the cause of your departure. I perceived, when you came in, that you looked vexed."

"And you read my looks right. Fanny has been annoying me by her——I will not say duplicity; but you know her provoking way of beating about the bush. She can't give a straightforward answer. And when she once takes a thing into her head, no human power can make her change. She has set her heart upon that boy Charles

entering the army, and it would be his ruin. He has good in him, and it would be a pity to see it thrown away. He is lost, if he becomes an idle man about town. But Fanny will not hear reason upon the subject; she is like one of those foolish mothers, who indulge their children till they become absolutely good for nothing. I am sorry for Charles, though he is foolish enough to listen to her."

"Don't be too hard upon him," Isabella replied, gently. "You must not judge others by your own standard. But I quite agree with what you say against the army. Why not speak to Charles himself upon the subject?"

"So I have, till I am tired of speaking, and he of listening. I'll tell you what, Isabella," he suddenly exclaimed; "I wish *you* would speak to him."

"I!" exclaimed Isabella, surprised. "Well! if you think so—but I fear my influence is very small indeed."

"No, I think not," said Frank, with a peculiar smile. "At all events, use what you have. It might be the saving of him. Tell him what folly it would be to let himself

be hurried into a step, of which he will, probably, all his life, repent. He has little money of his own ; he will get none from his uncle ; and to be a hanger-on upon my sister's bounty would be a degradation, to which he must not submit."

" No, that indeed he must not," said Isabella, with decision.

" What Charles should do, is to choose an honourable profession, and stick to it honourably. Help him, if you can, in his decision ; he never was famous for a precise knowledge of his own mind."

" He is still very young," pleaded Isabella. " Besides, to weigh, is not to waver."

" But if we weigh too nicely, the scales become inert. In most cases, advantages and disadvantages are pretty equally balanced ; still a decision is necessary. However, in the present instance, the business is not doubtful. Tell him so. Charles has lost too much time already. He must make up for it. I have repeated this advice over and over again, until, at last, it makes no impression upon him. Now you will say the old things, in a new manner ; and the novelty, if nothing else,

may perhaps rouse his attention. At all events, the experiment is worth trying. And now, farewell," he added, pulling out his watch. "My time is up." He shook hands with Isabella, looked at her affectionately, and moved towards the door. Then turning back, he said, half jestingly: "Whatever you do, you must not let poor Charles fall *too* much in love with you."

"Frank!" exclaimed Isabella, in a tone so thrilling as to make him start. He looked at her in amazement. "Really, Frank," she added, forcing a smile, but her voice trembled strangely, "you talk sad nonsense; I wonder you can be so absurd."

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLES had been out all day. Since Miss Romaine's arrival, this was an uncommon occurrence; but the fact was, that Lord Derwent's letter had puzzled him extremely; so he went into the woods to consider of it.

He returned in greater uncertainty than ever; and, consequently, in worse temper. He tossed down his hat and great-coat, and was sauntering off, with his hands in his pockets, to his own room, when the sound of Lady Ramsay's voice caused him to look up.

She was high above him, in a gallery which overlooked the lofty vestibule. "Where ha' ye been a' day?" she warbled sweetly, in the words of the Scotch song.

It was impossible to withstand the harmonising influence of her voice. "Those

sounds are enough to put any man's humour in tune," he said, half pleased, half crossly.

"And pray what may have put yours out?" she inquired, laughing.

"How can a man be in good humour when he is bothered and worried to death?"

"Come into the library, and we will talk it over." She hurried down stairs, and met him at the door.

Lady Ramsay placed a chair for him, and one for herself. Then looking at him with her soft, brilliant glance—"Come, sit down, and tell your old mother all about it."

This coaxing, soothing manner made him smile in spite of himself. "I believe, after all, that I am a great idiot," he said, stretching himself out comfortably in his chair.

"What crotchets have you got into your foolish head now, I should like to know?"

"I can't tell what you call crotchets, but that letter of Lord Derwent's——"

"A most satisfactory one, to my mind."

"Good Heavens! Lady Ramsay, how can you say so? Was ever a man placed in such awkward circumstances as mine? If I thought my uncle would continue to treat

me as he has hitherto done, I would, as your brother says, at once adopt a profession, and make myself independent. But if afterwards he should relent, it would be provoking, unnecessarily, to have toiled and drudged away the best years of my life."

"Toil and drudge!" exclaimed Lady Ramsay, with a look of horror; "oh never, with my consent. My handsome boy toil and drudge! I could not bear to see it. My young hero must not drudge. Frank is the best fellow in the world, but he has no soul for military glory. He does not understand its beauty, its grandeur, its poetry. The feeling is not in him. You are formed for a soldier; you were not made for a high stool and a ledger. Fancy that noble forehead furrowed by the multiplication table! Fancy you wiping your pen, with these silken waves! I could not stand it, Charles,—it would drive me mad. No, you are the very ideal of a soldier—face and figure are made for an uniform. All your pursuits are active. At school, you were the boldest boxer, the most dexterous cricketer, the most dauntless swimmer; then you became the most intrepid

rider, the keenest sportsman. Again, at Heidelberg, did you not out-student the students, not in wisdom, perhaps, but in wildness? Why, your Heidelberg exploits are famous and fabulous. *You* to talk of a counting-house, and a desk and an ink-horn! Oh fie! fie! I will not have it, I will not hear of it."

"That is all very well; but what am I to do?" said Charles, with irritable dejection.

"Do! Take the good the gods provide. Accept Lord Derwent's offer. I have already written to beg that the commission may not be filled up by another name. You must, however, write in confirmation of what I have said. *Et c'est une affaire finie.*"

"Oh, if the thing is done," he began, wilfully misunderstanding her words.

"Consider it so, Charles. And believe me, if anything is likely to make an impression upon your uncle, it is your entering the army, especially through Lord Derwent's interest. There has, you know, always existed a rivalry between them. They have opposed each other in political affairs, in amorous affairs, in everything. My making friends with your new

aunt, and through her, influencing your uncle in your favour, is problematic ; but Lord Derwent's proposal is certain. Accept it, and your uncle may be shamed into better behaviour. If anything will do it, that will. Success ensures favour. Depend upon it, your renown will gain Lord Overdale's good-will."

In what way this renown was to be achieved, Lady Ramsay did not explain, or Charles inquire ; but the word sounded agreeably in his ears ; and in her eyes the smile which it called forth, was very becoming. She was going to follow up her victory, when a servant came to say that Sir James did not feel well, and had asked for her several times.

" I don't think he ever had to ask for me twice before," she said to herself, as she hurried up-stairs ; " but this was a matter of importance, and I think I have carried my point. So sorry to have kept you waiting, dear Sir James," she began, in the clear, cheerful voice, most soothing to children and invalids, " but I had some pressing business with Charles Stanly."

" Charles Stanly, Charles Stanly, always

Charles Stanly," muttered the sick man, querulously.

"Sir James!" she exclaimed, with astonishment. But she stopped, for she recollected that he was suffering, and with her usual tenderness, she administered the remedies most likely to relieve him.

Lady Ramsay's words had given a marvellous rebound to Charles's spirits. He longed to communicate his pleasure. He had not seen Isabella all day, and he could not but feel, that it would be only civil to make inquiries respecting her foot. So he went forthwith to the boudoir.

After replying to numerous questions not particularly to the purpose, Isabella said, gently, "Sit down by me, Mr. Stanly; I want to have a little talk with you." Charles willingly obeyed.

"Do you remember how, as a boy, you used to consult me respecting your Latin themes, and your constructions?"

"Can I ever forget it, oh, Miss Romaine!"

"Well! now I am half inclined to be offended with you for not consulting me

about your future prospects in life, which are, I am told, at this moment pending.”

“ If I only thought you could take any interest in them—if I dared hope that the details would not bore you.”

“ No, no; they will not bore me.” She spoke calmly, and with little emphasis; but a spirit of sincerity pervaded her looks and words.

“ The fact is,” said Charles, speaking very hurriedly, “ that hitherto my prospects have been so very vague, that I hated to talk or even to think about them. But this morning a proposal has been made me, which almost determines my future career;—a line from my hand, and I am an officer in her Majesty’s service.” His eyes beamed with pleasure; Isabella was very loath to speak the word which should damp it.

“ But why choose the army? Why must your profession be military?”

“ Have you any dislike to the profession?” he asked, anxiously.

“ Far from it; but I do not think it suited to you. What I mean is simply this. Your

fortune is not adequate to support you in it as a gentleman."

"But I must ultimately succeed to my uncle's property. I am his only heir."

"There are possibilities which might cut you out. Besides, what do you intend to do meanwhile?" Charles reddened, and remained silent. Isabella proceeded: "I know that Lady Ramsay is kind, and generous, and would willingly assist you. But your independent spirit would not, I am sure, choose to incur obligations which you may never be able to requite. To do so would be undignified, and—pardon me—degrading."

Charles's countenance fell. He was at a loss what to answer.

"Your first step in life must not be a false one," Isabella proceeded, after a brief pause. "No, you must make yourself independent, and trust to your own talents. Charles Stanly must be subservient to none. He must exert his own abilities. By these, he must rise to fame far higher than can be reaped by the most brilliant military exploits. Oh, do not cast away God's most glorious gifts. I mean superior mental and intellectual powers."

There was in her words an earnest intensity which brought conviction with them. Isabella's gentle enthusiasm had in it something holy. Her manner was the very reverse of Lady Ramsay's. One was excitable, the other enthusiastic; perhaps no qualities are more opposite. Even an indifferent person must have been swayed by the mild, yet impressive voice, the long soft eye, with its deep fervour of expression; an expression, harmonious in its contrasts, and peculiar to herself; an expression of dignity without pride, of feeling without passion, of firmness tempered with softness. And Charles was no indifferent person. A sigh escaped him, which told volumes. There was rapture in that sigh. Its import could not be doubtful.

Voices were heard outside the door. Charles started from his dream of bliss, seized Isabella's hand, kissed it fervently, and hurried out of the room.

Isabella sought another opportunity of renewing the conversation with Charles, respecting his future plans; but many days elapsed, and it was impossible for her to see him alone. She was still confined to the sofa, and Lady

Ramsay was continually in the boudoir. The solicitude of the latter for her suffering friend, seemed daily to increase. When herself obliged to leave Isabella, she invariably made Aurora her substitute. No task could be more grateful to good little Aurora.

Good little Aurora had a profound admiration for Isabella, and an immense share of female curiosity. This had been strongly excited by Isabella's romantic history, and she longed to be made acquainted with some of its particulars. Little Aurora never having had any love affairs of her own, was fain to take interest in those of other people. She was convinced that Isabella must have a great deal to tell, if she would but tell it; and she determined to set her wits to work, in order to find it out. Her little attempts were, however, made in so comical a manner, that Isabella had not the most remote idea of their drift. Little Aurora's homely prosing did not interest Isabella as much as it ought to have done; and her narratives respecting poultry-yard, school-children, and village old women, however exciting of themselves, failed to elicit the hoped-for reciprocity of confidence.

But much more annoying to Isabella, was Lady Ramsay's exaggerated attention towards herself. She could not but perceive that part was assumed; however, as she also believed that some was genuine, she endeavoured to forgive the former in favour of the latter. Such indulgence would have been easy to her, had it not been for Charles's most provoking unsuspectingness. It was provoking to observe his grateful glances when Lady Ramsay rearranged Isabella's undisturbed cushions, or fussily shifted the injured foot from a comfortable position to one less easy. It was very provoking to hear him take every opportunity, favourable or otherwise, of dilating upon Lady Ramsay's touching self-forgetfulness. It was quite too provoking to hear his panegyrics upon the disinterested nature of female friendship, as illustrated by the beautiful and striking example she continually exhibited.

One very unexpected source of comfort made some atonement to Isabella, for these and various other annoyances, to which she was just then exposed. Chloe's touching kindness would often bring tears of gratitude into her eyes. It seemed as if the child could

not do enough to assist, or please her sister. She actually went every day into the village, to see the poor people whom Isabella was in the habit of visiting. Instead of upsetting their teapots, or frightening away their cats, according to her former practice, she listened patiently to their stories, though their patois was almost unintelligible to her; and when she got home, she did not even attempt to mimic their peculiarities. While Isabella was suffering, all her petulance and wilfulness vanished. She moved noiselessly about the room, and evinced a thoughtfulness and considerateness, quite beyond her years. During the night, she would get up frequently, to see whether her sister wanted anything. If Isabella moved, Chloe was by her side. Never was there a kinder, or more attentive little nurse.

The child was also far from well, having caught cold at the luckless rectory fête; but she would not, for a long time, own that she was ill. However, when her sister got better, she allowed the doctor to be consulted about herself.

Madame Rodostomus's fidgety restlessness

can hardly be imagined. Both her daughters being ill, and her luck disastrous, they were, of course, sure to die. It was only natural, that she should herself be miserable, and make everybody else so. For some time she did nothing but wander about the house, worrying, and wondering, and lamenting.

One day, while sitting by Isabella's couch, she suddenly exclaimed, after an unusually long silence :

“My dear, I have found it out.”

“Found what out, mamma?” inquired Isabella.

“I've been thinking a great deal about it, and could not at all account for it. I see it plainly now. It is all the climate of England; I wonder it never struck me before.”

“What can you mean, mamma?”

“My dear, don't you see, that it is impossible to be well in such a place. If we had remained in Italy, all this would not have happened. You would not have sprained your foot, and Chloe would not have caught cold, and everything would not have gone wrong. Oh, what an abominable place England is.”

For some little time, this discovery afforded

the old lady great consolation. She had the satisfaction of repeating it at least twenty times a day. There was not a servant in the house, to whom she did not confide her views upon the subject. But, unfortunately, a new idea struck her.

If the climate was so pernicious, how came it that she herself was not ill? Immediately she began to have conscientious scruples respecting her own impertinent good health. She felt, that it was wrong to be well. It was a sort of fraud against the English climate. Accordingly, she one day announced the immediate likelihood of her being taken ill upon the first inconvenient opportunity. Great was the universal alarm, for Madame Rodostomus, troublesome in health, was infinitely more so in sickness, real or imaginary.

Everybody had something to propose, in hopes of averting so painful a calamity; but every proposal was indignantly repelled. At last, Aurora, who had come to spend what she called "a nice long day" at the castle, originated a brilliant idea. "Might not change of air be of service to Madame Rodostomus? Change of air did do good sometimes.

Would Madame Rodostomus like to try change of air?"

Of course she would. Change of air was exactly what she wanted.

"But how am I to get it? Did I ever in all my life get a thing I wanted? Tell me that, Miss Foster.

"Well," said Aurora, reflectively, "I can't exactly tell you, because I really don't know; but I know, that you might have change of air, if you liked it."

"If I did *not* like it, you mean. My dear Miss Foster, let me tell you one thing; I am a remarkable person, and things always go contrary with me. The more I try to make them go straight, the more crooked they will go."

"Then do you know, if I were you, I would not try."

"Not try! Why, who can do anything without trying? It is one's duty to try, and nobody shall ever accuse me of not doing my duty."

"Well, then," said Aurora, getting very impatient, "try, or don't try, just as you

please ; but only let me advise you to change the air, if you think it good for you."

"Good for me ! The very thing for me ; but how am I to get it ? Isn't there Isabella lying upon the sofa, lamed for life ? Isn't there Chloe, with a cold, which will turn to a consumption, and she will die by inches ; just like her poor dear departed father, who was killed stone dead by a fall from his horse, and I'm sure the shock nearly killed *me*. What, *I* abandon my poor children ! I ! a widow, and a mother, and a Christian ! No, Miss Foster ; say no more upon the subject ; I'd not do it, even to save my life."

"Yes, but," persisted Aurora, "change of air would also be good for Chloe, and——"

"And leave my Isabella to pine and die all alone ! Miss Foster ! I am surprised to hear you propose such a thing. Thank God, I am not a monster. I never swerved from my duty, either towards my children or my husbands, and never shall ; yet everything through life has gone contrary with me. Whatever I wanted, I couldn't get ; whatever I got, I didn't want. Is there a Providence ? Of

course there is, and I don't in the least doubt it; yet, I must say, that, as far as I am concerned, I never should have found it out."

The widow looked curiously about the room, as if to discover in what part of it, Providence might, at that moment, happen to be concealed. Taking advantage of this pause, Aurora proceeded to explain, that Madame Rodostomus might get change of air, quite in an innocent way, and without abandoning anybody. The rectory was only two miles from the castle, and she might see Miss Romaine every day; and she herself would be so charmed, and her father would be so delighted to see Madame Rodostomus and Chloe, for a few days, at the rectory.

But at the bare mention of the word rectory, the widow nearly went into hysterics. *She*, set her foot within that fatal house! *She*, so much as approach its garden wall! For her part, she thought it wicked to tempt Providence. "If other people like colds, and sprained ankles, and deluges of rain, and powdered wigs, and no luncheons, it's all well and good; I have nothing to say against it. For my part, I have had ill-luck enough of

my own, and don't want other people's. My ideas of duty may be too strict. I don't say they are not; still, I maintain, that a mother ought to make any sacrifice for her children. That is *my* notion of duty, Miss Foster, and adhere to it I will, with God's assistance, though the whole world be against me."

Poor little Aurora turned scarlet with mortification. Here was a death-blow to an infinitude of castles in the air, which she had been building within the last five minutes. Her father's spiritual instruction was to convert Chloe to the Protestant faith. Her own genius for housewifery was to get up a first-rate dinner for Lady Ramsay. Her father's erudite conversation, and her own sensible observations, were to be exerted for the entertainment of Charles Stanly, and there was no knowing what might be the result;—and these delightful plans were all spoilt by the absurd crotchets of a superstitious old woman. It was enough to provoke a saint.

"After all," she said, fidgiting most ungracefully backwards and forwards in her chair, "I believe it is very lucky that you can't come. We are so busy just now. Papa

is making designs—beautiful things, I can tell you—for a conservatory, and a cow-house, and an observatory, and a pigsty, and a dairy, and an ice-house; and I have got all the parish business on my hands.” And she enumerated a most formidable list of important trifles. “I’m sure I don’t know how I shall get through it all. It really is so much better that you cannot come.”

“Then why did you ask us?” said little Chloe, sharply.

There was something wonderfully captivating about the child’s manner; an unaccountable fascination, which rendered her most attractive, when saying or doing what, in any other creature, would have been most the reverse.

Aurora, skilful in interpretations favourable to herself, fancied that she saw in Chloe’s pert speech, symptoms of disappointment at the rejection of what, to her, seemed so tempting an invitation. Besides, the good little soul could not forgive herself, either for the hard words she had spoken, or for others, still more so, which had risen unuttered to her lips. She longed to make it up again

with the old lady; and sagaciously judging, that the surest way of pleasing the mother, was to coax her child, she sidled up to Chloe. "You're a funny little pet," she began, in her comforting way, "and I should like to show you some of my pretty things. I've got such a beautiful collection of spiders, and a variety of stuffed animals, and I'm going to paper a room with queen's heads—it will be quite lovely—and if you could only see my little pigs—the sweetest little darlings—and I'm sure papa——"

"I don't want your papa, or your pigs either. By-the-by," she added, in an audible whisper to her mother, "she is something like a little pig herself."

"For shame, Chloe!" exclaimed Madame Rodostomus. Then bursting into a violent fit of laughter—"It is the wittiest thing I ever heard," she said, between her paroxysms, "the very cleverest thing!—a little pig!—he, he, he!—wonderful likeness, to be sure!—he, he, he! It will be the death of me. I can't think how these things come into her head. But you needn't mind it, my dear Miss Foster; I dare say nobody else will find it

out. I declare, I don't believe it ever would have struck me, if she hadn't put it into my head. But to be sure, the way in which she sees likenesses, is certainly something quite wonderful; and though I say it, who should not say it, there never was such a genius before !”

“ Some people's geese are all swans,” said Mrs. Tyrrell, smoothing her braids with an air of ineffable contempt. “ I wonder how they can reconcile it to themselves to have so high an opinion of their own. I am sure I can't be too thankful that I am not puffed up with any pride of that sort. I think humbly of myself, and of my children.”

“ Bravo !” exclaimed Chloe, “ there is nothing like giving oneself a good character. I should like to hear what your humility thinks of your tall daughter, with ringlets—nothing else.”

“ Will you hold your tongue, you pert little minx ?” said Arethusa, who had laughed at the witticisms addressed to her friend, but did not relish the notion of any such being applied to herself.

“ You dare me a little more, and I’ll tell you what *you* are like.”

“ See here, Chloe,” said Isabella, interposing. “ Look at this drawing; does it not remind you of something you have seen in Italy ?”

In a moment, the child’s attention was engrossed by a drawing of some Italian scenery, which Isabella had found in one of the albums lying upon the table. Isabella knew her sister’s artistic taste, and often turned it to account. When her mother was in the room, the only way of keeping the child within bounds was to divert her attention by exciting her imagination.

Then Isabella endeavoured to pacify Mrs. Tyrrell and Arethusa, but with little success. The former kept on fidgeting with her dress, and muttering something about pride, and the shocking vulgarity of praising one’s own. The latter tossed her head, and surveyed herself in the glass with an air of approbation to her own ringlets, and of defiance to every other person’s.

Aurora was easily mollified. In order to

atone for Chloe's rudeness, Isabella had made some good-humoured inquiries respecting Miss Foster's poultry-yard. This well-timed diversion set everything to rights; and by the time the latter had finished a detailed description of all her feathered favourites, her spirits were so completely restored, that she ventured a few more hints, to the effect that perhaps, at some future period, Madame Rodostomus might be inclined to visit her and her father.

Vain, however, were all her endeavours. The conscientious old lady adhered stoutly to her duty. One point only, she thought, might safely be conceded. Civility required it, and she always liked to be civil, where civility did not interfere with duty. She sent her card to the rectory, as in politeness bound, after a party; but she positively declined leaving it herself. Nothing could tempt her to walk, or drive, in that fatal direction; and she once had a serious quarrel with Charles, because he facetiously pointed out the ill-starred edifice, as forming a pleasing feature, in the distant landscape.

Chloe threw draughts and potions out of the window, and recovered accordingly.

Isabella, too, got better, notwithstanding her compliance with the doctor's prescriptions; but her strength returned slowly, and she was still obliged to lie upon the sofa the greater part of the day. Lady Ramsay's resources, in plans for her entertainment, were inexhaustible. However, Charles generally contrived to set them aside, and to read aloud for several hours of each day. Isabella found, in these readings, ample compensation for all other annoyances; but Lady Ramsay was of a less intellectual turn. Besides, she clearly perceived that, in all literary discussions, Isabella's superiority was undoubted. Lady Ramsay knew herself better than most women, but she had no particular desire to impart that knowledge to others. She therefore conceived a plan which should put a stop to the readings, or, at least, render them less frequent. This was, to invite to Eastrow a young painter, and a protégé of hers, Mr. Preston by name. Lady Ramsay was fond of patronising, and she had a profound admiration for genius, especially when accompanied by good looks, and Mr. Preston was decidedly good looking. He would soon

arrive, and then, as she shrewdly calculated, art would supersede literature. Lady Ramsay, be it observed, drew very cleverly, and Isabella, not at all.

Mr. Preston arrived, and drawing became the order of the day. Prodigious was the diffusion of artistic inspirations. All the ladies had something to show, and Mr. Preston admired all they showed. Arethusa's white velvet, stained with gaudy patches, *not* resembling flowers; Aurora's tidy netting-boxes, crawling with horribly natural animalculæ; Mrs. Tyrrell's parti-coloured diagrams, which she complacently lisped were not so *very* ugly,—he all separately and severally examined and extolled. Madame Rodostomus, also, had her share of praise. Although, indeed, she had nothing to show, she had the more to tell, of her remarkable talent for the art. To be sure, she had never been able to make anything look at all like what she intended to represent; but that, of course, was only her usual ill luck.

Mr. Preston was good looking and conceited. He wore his hair *à la Raphael*, and aped what he fancied were the most approved artistic

manners. He spoke in flowing periods, and used technical terms with evident pleasure. These various qualifications delighted Arethusia so much, that she whispered audibly to Aurora, that he was a dear darling genius, and that she *doted* upon genius.

When her friends had done prating and parading the talents they did not possess, Lady Ramsay, with her most winning smile, begged for a sight of Mr. Preston's charming portfolio. His reply was a request to see her own; to this, after a fair show of reluctance, Lady Ramsay consented. If Mr. Preston would gratify the party with his, in the morning, Lady Ramsay would bring hers, in the evening.

Frank had run unexpectedly down to East-row. He was rather annoyed to find Mr. Preston domesticated there. He did not like Mr. Preston. No talent could, in his eyes, atone for so much coxcombry and conceit, and, after all, Mr. Preston, though a clever artist, was by no means a first-rate one. However, Frank having good reason to be pleased with the way in which he had spent his time in London, being satisfied with the past, and

hopeful with respect to the future, was too happy, at that moment, to be inconveniently fastidious.

In the evening, the party assembled round Miss Romaine's sofa, in the boudoir. Mr. Preston, with well got up eagerness, reminded Lady Ramsay of her promise; and she was at length prevailed upon, to allow Charles to go to her painting-room, in quest of her portfolio.

Before shutting the door, he made a profound bow, half in fun, half in earnest, which caused Lady Ramsay to burst out laughing.

"How wonderfully little he is altered!" she exclaimed; "there is the same wicked look he had when he was a boy. How like he is to that picture, which was done of him at Baden!"

"May I be permitted to see the picture?" inquired Mr. Preston, with an insinuating look.

"Oh! here it is," said Lady Ramsay, taking a miniature out of a drawer.

She put it into Mr. Preston's hands, and he began an artistic anatomy of the picture. It was full of faults, of course. It was not his doing.

He favoured the company with a learned critique upon the art of painting in general, and his own style in particular, but his dissertation was brought to an untimely close, by a heavy weight falling upon his shoulder. He turned round quickly, and his head came into audible collision with Miss Foster's. Poor little Aurora, eager to see Charles's picture, had scrambled upon a chair behind Mr. Preston, and endeavouring to stretch her throat beyond the short limits assigned to it by nature, lost her balance, and but, for his catching her in his arms, she would have fallen upon the floor.

"What on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Charles, returning with the portfolio, in the midst of this bustle.

"Oh, nothing," said Lady Ramsay, quickly. "Don't tell him, don't let him see the miniature," she added, in a half-whisper. "I always, upon principle, abstain from inflating young gentlemen's vanity."

"I have it safe," said Aurora, who had got possession of it in the scuffle.

"What is it? I must, and will know?" said Charles; and in his good-humoured, bantering

way, he tried to wrest the secret from Lady Ramsay. But it was her pleasure to be quite impenetrable on the occasion.

An exclamation from Frank, interrupted their playful dispute. He had carried off his sister's portfolio into the drawing-room, and with Mr. Preston, was examining its contents.

"What's the matter, Frank?" said Lady Ramsay, joining them.

"How very beautiful!" said Frank, musingly, and holding a drawing in his hand.

"Beautiful, do you think it? Well, I did take some pains with it. But the head is unfinished. It is a copy of Carlo Dolce's Poetry, which I saw at the Corsini Palace at Florence. It certainly is a lovely head."

Frank continued earnestly gazing at the drawing, and then said, slowly: "Very lovely, and very like."

"Like!" exclaimed Lady Ramsay, slightly colouring. "What do you mean? It is the copy of a picture you never saw, and taken chiefly from memory."

"Yes, but it is the memory of a person, not of a picture."

“Of a person!” and her colour rose higher.

“A person whom you know very well, and whose image was probably in your mind when you drew that exquisite head.”

“Let me see it,” said Lady Ramsay, with impatience.

“I have discovered the likeness,” exclaimed Charles, triumphantly. He had joined the party unperceived, and was looking at the picture over Frank’s shoulder. “It certainly is like, but, without disparaging your talent, Lady Ramsay, I must say that Miss Romaine’s features and expression are both so infinitely superior.”

“Give it me, give it me!” and Lady Ramsay was about to take the drawing out of Frank’s hands, when Charles forestalled her, and held it, laughingly, high above her head.

Lady Ramsay’s face became crimson. She, however, commanded her voice sufficiently to say, with tolerable calmness: “Do give it me, Charles. It is really not worth making a fuss about. It is a nasty thing, a mere daub.”

“Since you set so little value upon it, perhaps you will give it to me. I have a taste for nasty daubs.”

“Nonsense, Charles. I will give you something much better.”

“But if I happen to like bad best! Long ago you promised me one of your drawings.”

“Any other you please. That does me too little credit. It is really not worth looking at. I am positively ashamed of it.”

“*Raison de plus* for letting me keep it. You don’t like the sketch, I do.”

“Come, Charles, don’t be foolish. Give me the picture. I *will* have it, indeed I *must*.” Her voice was getting beyond control.

“No, no, you must not,” he replied, in his wayward manner. “Possession is nine-tenths of the law.” He looked at Isabella in the distance, then at the drawing, and then again at Isabella.

Lady Ramsay’s self-command was fast giving way. Her hands clenched involuntarily. How she longed to feel the luckless sketch, crushed to a ball, within them! “Oh, the picture!” she began; but she could trust her voice no further.

“I’ve got it, and I’ll keep it, with your leave, or without.” And Charles made a

jocose obeisance; but she turned away, pretending not to notice it.

“What’s that about my child’s likeness?” squeaked Madame Rodostomus, darting into the room. “Won’t some one show it me? *I am* proud of her beauty; it may be absurd, but I really can’t help it.”

“I wonder how people can be always praising their own,” lisped Mrs. Tyrrell; “*I* never do it, though I might, for certainly my child is as handsome as any girl in England.”

“And so she is,” said Aurora; “and so is Miss Romaine; and I dare say the picture’s very like, though I’m sure it is not so handsome, because what could be?”

“You’re right there, Miss Foster,” chimed in the widow; “and I shall always say that you’re a sensible girl—very. No picture can be so handsome as my Isabella, of course, for she *is* a beauty; and certainly no girl ever was so much admired before,”—here she gave a crushing glance at Mrs. Tyrrell—“especially by gentlemen. They’re all in love with her; and she might marry anybody, any day—only when one is once married, one can’t unmarry,

let one wish it ever so much, which is very inconvenient; as I'm sure I've had reason to know. Still,"—she leant, confidentially, towards Aurora—"I do wish I could understand one thing; all I want to know is, what can be the use of all her beauty; only see what it has come to! It's all luck does it, not beauty, you may take my word for it. Now, I only ask, isn't she lying there in that boudoir, upon that sofa, with a sprained ankle, just as if she were as ugly as—as anybody; and, indeed, Miss Foster, you may console yourself with the idea, that all the beauty in the world is no good whatever; for depend upon it, my dear, beauty don't make us greater, or richer, or happier, or luckier,—or anything."

Aurora did her best to profit by these instructive observations. She squeezed the miniature tight in her little fat hands; and tried hard to lay the valuable unction to her soul. But it would not do. A rebellious longing for good looks would predominate over her better reason. Vanity was a great sin; she felt it keenly; still she *did* wish to be pretty.

It was very wrong, to be sure, but she could not help it.

Meanwhile, Isabella had been looking through Mr. Preston's album, which he, as if by chance, had left upon the table; beside her Chloe was sitting, perched on the back of her sister's sofa, with her little feet in Isabella's lap, and deeply engrossed by the drawings.

"What a charming group the sisters would make, just as they are at this moment," said Frank, looking at them through a vista formed by the frame of the door.

"Oh! try it, Mr. Preston," exclaimed Charles, with great eagerness. "This head, lovely as it is, cannot be called a portrait. The eyes, especially, are quite different from Miss Romaine's; hers are so hazy, so soft."

"Yes, Miss Romaine's eyes are, indeed, unique," said Mr. Preston, as he advanced slowly towards the sofa, affectedly throwing his head into the most approved artistic attitudes, expressive of admiration. "And if she would do me the honour to permit me to make the attempt, I should be both proud and happy, however difficult the endeavour,

or dubious the success; for those eyes are really so very—how shall I express my conception——”

“*Unique*,” exclaimed little Chloe, who, springing with one bound from her exalted seat to the floor, lighted within half a quarter of an inch of the astonished artist, and thus brought his eloquence to an untimely conclusion. “And *my* eyes pray, how shall you express your *conception* of them? Are they also *unique*?” she added, mocking his conceited mispronunciation. “What colour do you call them?” She opened her large eyes very wide, and fixed them full upon him.

“Why grey—grey, of course; yet, stay: I should rather say hazel; but no, they are not quite hazel, either: they are more blue, dark blue, black; and yet I think it would be better to call them—by Heavens! they change colour every instant.”

Chloe burst out laughing. She skipped like a kitten about the room, clapping her hands with glee. “My eyes are Greek, I beg here to say, not English; and you shall see me to-morrow in my Greek dress; and you shall take my picture; and how you *will* puzzle over my

eyes. What fun it will be to see you ; you'll never hit the right colour ! What fun ! what fun ! what fun !” She pirouetted, and danced towards the door. Then she paused for a moment, to sing Rossini's “ Buona sera ;” after which, with a curtsey down to the very ground, and a glance round the room, in which fun, coquetry, fire, and languor were marvellously blended, she vanished from the room.

“ Was ever such a creature as that ?” exclaimed the delighted mother. “ She *has* eyes, has my Chloe, just like her poor, dear, departed father's. He always used to say that English women have no eyes at all to speak of ; he never saw one but me who had anything that could be called eyes ; and my Chloe takes after me ; and whatever people may say, they will never say that she is not a real beauty ; and I'm proud of it : it may be absurd ; I don't say it isn't ; but I really can't help it.”

“ She is, indeed, a beautiful child !” said Mr. Preston. “ I should like, exceedingly, to take her picture, and if Miss Romaine would only sit——” he added, turning towards the latter, with what he considered an irresistibly insinuating air.

“She won’t,” interrupted the old lady, “not she; nothing will make her. There have been all sorts of painters, and sculptors, and amateurs, and architects, all dying to paint her; and the more I begged her, the less she would. She’s a good girl is my Isabella; but for all her gentleness, she is sometimes very obstinate.”

“Firm, you mean,” interposed Frank. Then, turning to Isabella, he said: “I should like to see a good picture of you. Why will you not let Mr. Preston try it?”

“Simply,” she replied, “because I trust that my real friends will never forget me, and I do not care to be remembered by any others.”

“No, your real friends will never forget you,” said Frank; “still, a portrait of those we love is always gratifying.”

“Hardly, I think,” replied Isabella; “for we are never satisfied with it. It may represent the features, but it can never render the expression—at least, not the expression we love best—I mean, that appropriated to us only, and which we may, therefore, claim as our own.”

“Oh, Miss Romaine, if you only would——” said Charles, approaching the sofa. Then,

addressing Frank, he added, in a low voice, "I wish you would go and smooth down your sister, she is in a rage with me about the head, which I have got, and won't give up."

"What's that about the head?" screamed Madame Rodostomus, running into the drawing-room after Frank and Mr. Preston.

Charles leant over Isabella's sofa, and proceeded, at the end of a moment's pause, "Miss Romaine, I have done all—more than all you required of me—the commission is given up—and, will you not grant me this one little favour—your picture? Oh, Isabella!"

He bent low over her, as he spoke the last whispered words. One person, nevertheless, had heard them. Little Aurora, attracted by some irresistible power, had crouched down upon a stool behind the sofa, with the miniature in her hand, and her worsteds in her lap; and there she remained as if fascinated, and unable to move. Neither Charles nor Isabella were aware of her vicinity.

"Isabella!" he proceeded, with renewed fervour—but he was interrupted by a strange sound—good little Aurora had involuntarily started. There was something in the intonation of that second Isabella, which made her

feel that she ought not to hear any more ; and she strove to rise. But her stool being low, and herself fat, it was no easy matter to do so noiselessly. She got half-way, but lumped down again, unfortunately not upon the stool, but upon the ground. Away flew the balls of worsted—and, before she could reach the door—down tumbled the miniature. The door banged violently, and the miniature rolled to Charles's feet. To perceive it, to seize it, and to press it into Isabella's hand, was the work of a moment ! “That this should happen at this moment—how wonderful ! Who shall withstand the dictates of fate ? This picture—if you did but know its destination ! Oh, there is a meaning in the gift—a deep meaning. I dare not tell—but you can guess it. You do, you do—I see it in that look—I see it in those eyes. Oh, you understand me, and you will not refuse me your picture. If it had but the expression you wear now—may I not say—my expression ?——”

His eagerness carried him away. It deprived him of all control over his voice. The last words, intended only for her ear, were spoken aloud.

But Charles was unconscious of his mistake. He was lost in contemplation of Isabella. She remained silent and still; but there was an expression in her stillness, an eloquence in her silence, which spoke volumes. Her cheek was veiled, but a rich crimson glow, like a sunbeam imprisoned in alabaster, suffused her face and throat. She made no attempt to speak; she made no attempt to return the picture. Indeed, she could not do so unperceived—for now all eyes were upon her—she was aware that Charles had already betrayed too much. She concealed the miniature in the folds of her dress, as she cast upon Charles a look of warning. The glance was momentary, and full of sadness; but he saw only the tenderness with which it was blended. Charles was intoxicated with joy, and turning away to conceal his emotion, he saw Lady Ramsay standing in the doorway. One look told him that she had guessed all.

Their eyes met: instantly Charles was sobered. Unbidden, he fetched her candle, lighted it, and put it into her hands. She did not thank him, she did not even look at him; as she took the candle, she held her head

averted ; he could not see the expression of her countenance ; but he knew that she trembled, for the snuffers and extinguisher rattled in their sockets.

Yet, it was with a soft, caressing voice, that she reminded her friends that it was time to withdraw. She looked at each, in turn, to gather their assent ; but she carefully avoided Charles's eye. Then she went towards Isabella, to offer her assistance in rising from the sofa ; but, suddenly stopping, she said to her brother,

“Be my substitute, Frank ; or, rather, resume your post. I was the usurper during your absence ; but I would not, on any account, deprive you of the pleasure of assisting Miss Romaine.”

She helped Sir James up-stairs, and with her usual kindness, assisted him to bed, and watched by him till he went to sleep. It was not till she was assured that he was resting quietly, that she sought her own couch, which was always within call of the invalid.

But she could not sleep. Charles's words sounded in her ears like a knell—“My expression,” she kept repeating to herself.

“What could he mean? Yet, he cannot be in love with that cold, unfeeling woman. Poor Charles!”

With these words, she fell asleep; but she soon started up in terror. Some fearful noise had roused her from a delicious dream. She listened; all was still. But then came a feeble moan from the invalid; and she somehow knew that he had called her before; and that his faint cry had dispelled visions which even now seemed reality. In another moment, she was by her husband's side, and her firm round arm supported his emaciated frame, and his aching head was pillowed upon her bosom. “Dear Sir James, are you ill?” she inquired tenderly, as she saw his leaden features light up with unutterable affection.

“Oh, Fanny, Fanny!” he murmured, “how pretty you look; why do you look so pretty? You look wonderfully pretty!”

She replied, by pressing her lips upon his forehead. She busied herself in endeavours to relieve her husband's suffering; she presently succeeded, and smiled with pleasure, as she saw him sink into a calm sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning, everything wore a brighter aspect in Charles's eyes. It seemed to him as if the world and everything in it had suddenly become beautiful. Lady Ramsay never presided at the breakfast-table with so much grace, or so much affability. Frank, Arethusa, Mrs. Tyrrell, and Mr. Preston, had each, and all, improved marvellously during the night. As for Madame Rodostomus, she seemed, on this particular morning, exceedingly agreeable. Charles wondered why he had never made this discovery before. Of course, the fact of her being Isabella's mother, had nothing whatever to do with it.

Not that Charles attended much to her conversation, or to that of any of the others; in fact, he had no idea what they were talking about;

but their voices proved an agreeable accompaniment to an ecstatic reverie, in which he was luxuriously indulging. This abstracted him so entirely, that, although always very anxious for letters (he still hoped that something would turn up from his uncle), he was not, in the least, aware that the groom of the chambers walked past him empty-handed.

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Lady Ramsay, in her surprise, forgetting to modulate her voice, “what is this? Charles! what does this mean?”

Startled by the angry tone in which she spoke, Charles made a rapid descent from the heaven, where he had been wandering with Isabella, and begged Lady Ramsay to explain further.

“Explain! It is you must explain. There is a letter from Lord Derwent, referring to one which he has received, as he says, some time ago, from you; in which, it seems, you refuse the commission that I solicited so anxiously, and obtained with so much trouble.”

“What Lord Derwent says is quite true. I did refuse the commission. All I can say is,

that I regret your trouble, and am very grateful for your kindness.”

“I think you might have informed me of your decision, and consulted me, before you wrote.”

“In truth, Lady Ramsay, I forgot to do so. But the affair was so entirely personal, that I thought—— Besides, I have been much pre-occupied of late.” To his extreme annoyance, he felt himself getting redder and redder every moment——“And the fact is, that, somehow, lately, I have hardly had an opportunity of speaking to you. I seldom see you alone now, and——”

“That will do, Charles ; that will do. But let me tell you, that another time, you must get somebody else to take trouble about your affairs. I will do so no more.”

He saw that Lady Ramsay was angry, and he felt that she had every reason to be so. He was sorry for it, but he was, at that moment, too happy, to be much affected by anything. It was all he could do to restrain his joy, as he said, in a tone which he intended to be persuasive, but which, despite himself, betrayed his exulting feelings, “Come, come,

Lady Ramsay, we must not quarrel in public, and you must not condemn me unheard. I have a great deal to say——”

“Which I have no inclination to hear,” she said, in a still more angry voice.

“But you *must* hear; and when you have heard, I flatter myself, that you will not only excuse, but approve the motives which prompted my conduct.”

Lady Ramsay made no answer. She could not trust herself to speak then. It was with great difficulty that she composed her features, and resumed her natural manner.

Charles took the first opportunity of escaping from the room. He was in no mood to encounter either Lady Ramsay’s bantering, or her coaxing. He was too happy to be angry, or even to appear so; and he felt that, under the present circumstances, the only way of managing Lady Ramsay would be to take the aggressive, and loudly proclaim himself ill-used. He felt that he was decidedly in the wrong, as regarded his behaviour to her; and though he had an excellent excuse for it, as far as was himself concerned, he could not but acknowledge that she was not likely to con-

sider it such. He dreaded his next tête-à-tête with her; and sought, if he could not escape, at least to postpone the evil hour. He was in that state of excitement, which renders it impossible to think of any but the one all-engrossing subject. He could hardly believe in his own happiness, and yet he knew it was true. That look of Isabella's dispelled all doubt. She, the idol of his childhood, the ideal of his youth—she, the sum of all human perfection, Isabella Romaine—loved him.

Since her accident, Isabella came down late; it would, therefore, be some time before he could see and speak to her. He could not remain quiet in any place. An irresistible impulse sent him abroad. He must have air, space, freedom. It was as if the room, the house, the world, were all too small to contain the immensity of his happiness.

He slipped out of the house, unperceived by Lady Ramsay, and plunged, at once, into the nearest thicket.

Frank, too, had gone out early. The fresh morning air was in accordance with the tone of his mind. He felt hopeful, and happy, and he felt that he deserved to be so. He had

gone to London in hopes of winning a cause, and he had won triumphantly. It was an intricate one; yet his clear exposition of it, the soundness of his arguments, and his concise, masterly style of summing up, carried the whole court with him. The complimentary letters, which he received from the highest quarters, were enough to turn any man's head. But Frank's head was not easily turned. All his life, he had had but one object in view. Each success he achieved was only valuable as bringing him nearer to the wished-for goal; and now he believed it to be within his reach.

He had gone to London with a fixed purpose. If he won his cause, he would immediately return, and lay his laurels at Isabella's feet. He knew that she liked him better than any other man; and he had always hoped, and believed, that, in time, her friendship would ripen into a warmer feeling. She was, in many respects, as he thought, superior to himself; his talents did not equal hers, but he felt the proud consciousness, that his heart, at least, was worthy of Isabella.

In the course of his long walk over the hills, Frank had settled his plan of conduct.

He would speak to Isabella at once, and lay before her, openly, the state of his mind. He would hurry her into no engagement, but let time do its work. The more he considered the circumstances in which she were placed, the more he believed that they would terminate advantageously for himself.

“Halloo, Charles!” he exclaimed, as he saw the latter coming towards him at a rapid pace, and so absorbed in his own thoughts, that he was close upon Frank before he perceived that he was near—“whither are you bound, in so tremendous a hurry?”

Charles looked up, surprised. “Well met, old fellow,” he said. “Which way are you going? I will turn with you.”

They walked for some moments, without speaking. Charles wished Frank to begin the conversation, but he could contain himself no longer, and exclaimed, in tones of joyful excitement, “Well, Frank! it is all settled; I have given up the army.”

“I am glad of it,” said Frank, heartily. “I always thought, that, upon reflection, you would find that I was right.”

“Don’t take too much credit to yourself, Mr. Frank. I am by no means sure that your advice would have carried the day, without the assistance of a fair auxiliary, whose interference you little suspected.”

“I beg your pardon. Miss Romaine and I had a long talk about you, just before my departure.”

“Oh, Frank!” exclaimed Charles, who, in the intoxication of his delight, neither heard nor understood what his friend was saying—“oh, Frank! what have I done that *she*—such an angel as she—should take so deep an interest in my prospects?”

“It is but natural that Miss Romaine should take interest in the boy she has known so long.”

“Boy!” exclaimed Charles, bridling up. “She does not look upon me as a boy, I can tell you. Far from it,” he added, in his first tone of enthusiasm. “Frank! she spoke of me in such terms, I am afraid I do not deserve half the praise she bestowed upon me, though I own, I am not particularly sorry to receive it from her.”

“ I believe you, there. Her praise is indeed worth having.”

Charles went on, without listening to Frank: “ She told me I had superior talents—superior powers were her words—superior mental and intellectual powers. Was that not encouragement, Frank? Since she spoke thus, I feel quite another man—capable of really great things. I shall instantly embrace a profession; and I want to consult you with respect to which I am best suited for. I see that the army will not do. I must make myself independent. Miss Romaine—Isabella, said so. I must choose a line, in which I can raise myself by my own exertions. I shall work hard, toil night and day, exert myself to the utmost. My uncle may have a dozen sons, if he pleases; it is all one to me. I will show him, that I neither want his money nor his interest.”

“ That is right,” said Frank; “ that is the way to see things. It is only what I expected of you.”

“ Diplomacy is what I should like, but I must be guided by circumstances. At all events, I will choose something which shall soon—I mean, before very long—enable me to

become independent; so that I may, without imprudence, be able to settle in life."

"Settle in life! At twenty, to think of settling in life! Was ever such madness heard of?"

"Call it madness, if you will," said Charles, good-humouredly; "I don't pretend to be very sane just at present; and perhaps, old fellow, under similar circumstances, you might be just as mad yourself."

"What can you mean? What circumstances?"

"You are marvellously obtuse this morning, Frank. Is it not enough to drive any man mad, with joy, to see an accomplished and beautiful woman interest herself in him. When your turn comes, Frank, by Jove! how I'll bully you."

"This is no subject for jesting."

"I never was more serious in my life."

"Because Miss Romaine spoke civilly to you, you are surely not so mad as to infer——"

"I infer nothing; I *know*." Charles coloured violently, as he spoke. "There are words, and looks, in which a man cannot be mistaken. Miss Romaine is no coquette, or it might be

otherwise ; but what she says, she feels ; what she seems, she is. I know that she is superior, far superior to me, in mind, in intellect, in everything. I can, indeed, hardly account for her preference of me. Yet the very fact, that such is the case, raises my self-esteem, and makes me hope that I may—in time, at least—become not wholly unworthy of her.” The last sentences were spoken with feeling and earnestness.

He might have gone on for ever, earnestly or not ; Frank was incapable of interrupting him. He was transfixed with astonishment. That the boy Charles, even in his wildest dreams, should conceive the possibility of being worthy of Isabella Romaine, seemed presumption, almost beyond his powers of comprehension. Amazement, for some moments, kept him silent. Then in a voice, which he vainly endeavoured to render calm, he said :

“ Some day, you will find out your mistake. But as my words are not likely to weigh much with you, in your present state of delirium, I think we had better resume the subject at some future opportunity.”

Frank turned abruptly down a path, which led straight to the house. Charles stood, for a few moments, looking after him. "What an odd fellow he is!" he said to himself. "What would he be at now? Madness! delirium! to admire what is beautiful! Or is he in love with her himself, and jealous of her preference of me? Poor Frank! he is the best fellow in the world, but not suited to Isabella. He has a warm heart, and a good understanding; but she requires more than that. How deeply she appreciates whatever is grand, and exalted, and chivalrous!" Charles drew himself up, and stepped out proudly. "Oh, she is a noble creature; so gentle, yet so enthusiastic! Lady Ramsay calls her cold and insensible; so she is—to the generality."

Charles walked on, hardly able to control his rapture. He longed to give it vent by some act of extravagance. He longed to publish his happiness to the whole world. He could not move, like any other ordinary mortal. He flew along. He trod upon air. He plunged deeper into the woods, with a vague idea that the thickly-spreading branches

of the trees would hold him down upon earth. He felt as if, without some such restraint, he must fly off to some higher region, which, however delightful, he had no fancy to visit just then, Isabella's abode being, for the present, established within the limits of this lower world.

Meanwhile, Frank walked home, at a brisk pace. Charles's disclosure made him feel uncomfortable. He pitied Charles for indulging in a dream, from which the waking must be painful. "But, after all," he thought, within himself, "her advice will be of infinite service to him, and he will soon recover his disappointment. I may wrong Charles, but I cannot help suspecting that vanity has no small share in his love, else he could not be so ready to talk about it. Deep affections are always silent. His security is preposterous—revolting."

Frank reached home, went straight to his room, and began writing. But, somehow, he could not shake off his preoccupation. The right words either would not come at all, or came at the wrong place. His constructions were involved, his sentences inverted, and his

style altogether unlike his usual clear, concise mode of diction.

Just as he had spoilt his third sheet of lawyer's foolscap, he received a message from Isabella, to beg that he would drive her in the pony chaise to a favourite spot of hers, called the Grotto. Since her accident, Lady Ramsay had appropriated the little carriage solely to Isabella's use.

The weather was lovely; sunny, but not cloudless. It was just such as to enhance the beauty of the prospect.

What an opportunity for Frank! He left his room, determined to profit by it; and, in the course of their drive, to unfold to Isabella the deepest secret of his heart.

However, they reached a spot, at which they were to leave the carriage, without exchanging a word. There was an unusual restraint in Isabella's manner, which Frank was at a loss to interpret.

He helped her out of the carriage. "You will never be able to walk so far as the grotto," he said.

"I will try," she replied, tremulously.

“You seem fatigued already. You look pale.”

“No, I am not fatigued, only a little nervous. I have something to say to you, Frank, which requires courage to introduce.”

“The sooner a disagreeable thing is said, the better,” he replied, endeavouring to speak calmly.

“I am very foolish, Frank, to let my nervousness get the better of me—but—I cannot speak just yet. I will tell you all, when we reach the grotto.”

“This is not like yourself, Isabella. You, generally so self-possessed, to hesitate thus—and with me!”

There was something in his tone which seemed to make Isabella still more nervous. She withdrew the arm he had drawn within his; and began walking very fast, in advance of him.

He followed her, musing. Why should he not, now, make the intended disclosure? When she found how dear she was to him, she might confide in him more entirely. Once assured of his affection, she would feel, that to serve her, was the greatest pleasure this life could afford him.

Frank repeated this reasoning over and over to himself; still he walked on without speaking. He felt instinctively that the moment was unpropitious. Indeed, he kept at a sufficient distance from Isabella to make conversation inconvenient. An uncontrollable restraint kept him silent; and he felt greatly relieved when their path became too narrow to admit of their walking side by side.

They now turned into a road. The road lay along the edge of a deep ravine. A mountain stream foamed and frolicked in the chasm beneath. Both sides of this ravine were clad with trees, whose knotted roots twisted themselves into shapes as grotesque as they were beautiful. They formed airy bridges, light festoons, ponderous arches, and all manner of wild and fantastic figures. A steep bank rose on the other side of the path. The trees, which covered it, glowed in the magnificent colouring of autumn. The ground was carpeted with bright green moss, and the high ferns spread their feathery leaves, as if to protect the gay flowerets, wantoning in the long sunbeams, which rippled through the dense foliage. Here and there were seats; and

opposite to these, vistas. The miniature sea-views looked beautiful through their leafy framework. Vessels dotted the distant picture, and their sails shone like burnished gold in the dazzling sunlight.

Presently, the path became steeper and narrower. Frank had enough to do, in holding back the projecting branches, and in rolling away the stones, which impeded their progress. They stood watching these, as they bounded and rebounded down the bank, till they plashed frantically into the water below.

At length, Frank and Isabella emerged from the thick glade. They stood for a moment, gazing upon the beautiful stretch of coast at their feet, undulating alternately in light and in shadow; here, gracefully waving into a smiling bay; there, stretching out into a stern promontory. A few steps further up the cliff brought them to the grotto. Thence was indeed a glorious prospect. In front, lay the broad blue ocean, like a vast azure desert, spangled with gold. The waves broke majestically upon the shingled beach. Mountain after mountain of light foam rose, and rolled over into sheets of pure snow,

deeply fringed with gold. Behind them spread an ocean of forest; beautiful also and boundless, but calm and still. The grotto was situated upon a high cliff, from whence they commanded many miles of view. Waves of green, and purple, and gold, were heaped one above another, like a stormy sea suddenly arrested in its course. Isabella sunk upon a bush, overpowered by her feelings.

“What a glorious prospect! and shall I never see it more!” burst from her, involuntarily.

“Never see it more! why should you talk of never seeing it more?”

“Because there is little probability of it. I must leave Eastrow — England. Yes, I must go—and go soon.”

“Go—Isabella? Why? What can have prompted this sudden determination?”

“Why?—Oh, a great many reasons. My mother dislikes the climate. We are poor, and cannot well afford the expense of living in England. Besides——”

“But you knew all these things before. You told me you intended to try our winter

here, and see how it would suit with your mother's health, and your finances?"

"Yes, I know I did. I thought so then—but now——"

"You amaze me, Isabella. I never before saw you thus. You are not like yourself."

"Yes, I know I am not like myself. I am very weak, and very foolish."

Frank looked at her intently for some moments. Her colour went and came incessantly. What could move her thus? He feels a chill at his heart, but he would not listen to its forebodings.

"Something strange must have occurred to make you waver in a manner so unusual to you."

"Yes, something strange has occurred," she said, slowly repeating his words, and speaking as in a dream. "It is strange, indeed. Oh, God! how strange!"

"Isabella!" he exclaimed, with amazement.

"Frank, your warning came too late—too late." A deep blush told the rest.

But Frank did not, or would not, understand her. He chose to see neither the blush, nor the imploring look which accompanied it.

He went on reasoning according to his own wishes.

“ And if it is so, you cannot mean to expatriate yourself on account of that foolish boy’s presumptuous aspiration. You must know, as well as I do, what is likely to be the duration of his attachment. Leave him to rue his folly ; and let us calmly consider what is best for yourself. I am aware that your circumstances may preclude your fixing altogether in England—you think so, at least—and I will not, at present, contest the point. But try one winter here. See whether the climate would suit your mother ; make inquiries about the expense of living in England, and consider whether you could afford it or not. This will require time. Meanwhile, I am sure my sister will be happy to have you with her. You know that my mother and Arethusa spend the winters in London with me. As for Charles Stanly, he cannot remain much longer a guest at Eastrow. He has already wasted too much time. I propose taking him with me to town, and adopting active measures for establishing him in some useful profession. His comfort, therefore, need

not interfere with your plans. Leave that to my care."

Isabella shook her head mournfully.

"No, no, Frank, it cannot be. I must go; I must go soon. As you say yourself, Charles has wasted too much time already. Nor must his attention be directed from the course of study he will have to pursue. He must work hard and unfettered. His talents must have their full, free scope. He must neither see, nor think of me. The parting must be immediate and complete."

Frank changed colour, but was too much agitated to speak. She proceeded calmly—the effort it cost her to appear calm was greater than even Frank, well as he knew her, could have imagined—"I am going to beg you will do me a service. It is an important service; I know you will not refuse me." She paused, as if waiting for Frank's answer; but he made none, and she went on. "The task I require of you is not an agreeable one. It is sad to inflict pain, even to ensure future relief; yet this is what you must do, Frank. Prepare Charles gradually for our departure. I want

him to get accustomed to the idea before it is talked of openly ; and then I will tell my mother that I am able to travel."

There was another pause. It was a long one. Isabella, contending with her own feelings, did not mark the struggle, which all Frank's self-possession could not enable him to conceal. At last, he spoke in hard, forced tones :

" You are wrong in supposing it necessary to leave England on Charles Stanly's account. You take the case too seriously. Time allays all sorrows ; and, believe me, Charles is not a man to sorrow long. I know him better than you do. He is incapable of receiving a deep and lasting impression. He is young in years, younger in disposition—in fact, a mere boy still, not worth thinking so much about. I do not understand your scruples. I cannot imagine why you are in such haste to go."

" Why I go ?" A deep colour rose to her cheek, indignant tears were in her eyes, and her voice vibrated strangely. " Why I go ? I am surprised to hear you condemn a friend so harshly, so unjustly. Why I go ? Because

I will not mar his prospects, or retard his fortune. Because his happiness requires it of me,—and mine.” Her face was buried in her hands.

There was a short pause. To Frank it seemed of endless duration. Presently Isabella looked up. Frank was shocked at the change which a few moments had wrought in her countenance. Her cheek was pale, her eyes swollen, her lips quivered with suppressed emotion.

“Are you ill?” he inquired, uneasily.

“No; but I would be alone. I must be alone. Leave me for a while. We will talk more presently.”

Frank obeyed her. He also required to be alone. He felt bewildered, stunned, as by a violent blow. Did Isabella really love Charles Stanly? Could it, indeed, be true? Slowly he followed the path along the cliff, which led in a different direction to that by which he and Isabella had come.

CHAPTER X.

ISABELLA remained for some time, in the same mournful attitude. In vain she strove to collect her thoughts. She heard Frank's step grow fainter and fainter, and then cease in the distance; but her mind was so confused, that she hardly understood why he went, or why she had sent him. The immense effort she had made to speak so calmly seemed to have paralysed her faculties. She was stunned, physically and mentally.

At last, she raised her head, and gazed vacantly at the glorious prospect before her. There was stretched the broad blue ocean, dazzling in light. It lay like a polished mirror, smooth and brilliant—save where its surface was lightly dimpled by the soft west breeze—or kissed by the sunbeam into smiles.

But the external gladness increased Isabella's depression. The outward harmony was like a mockery of the discord within. It was as if nature held festivity over the dreary gloom of her heart. She felt as if, in the whole creation, there was not one being who would sympathise with her sorrow; not one who could feel either for her, or with her.

“Yet, what am I?” she said to herself. “What am I, to sadden at the sight of this glorious joy and beauty? I am a dissonance in the universal harmony, a blot on the fair face of nature. Why am I rebellious and discontented, when all around me is peace and gladness? Why can I not submit, and be happy? Happy!—yes, I might have been happy; for I might have made his happiness. O God, to think what might have been, and feel what is!

“But it is done—done—my fate is sealed. I spoke the word, and it cannot, must not, be recalled. It is best—it *shall* be best thus.”

And she tried to recapitulate the motives which had prompted her decision. She had weighed them well; and but a short time ago, they seemed unanswerable. It was, in every

respect, necessary to return to Italy; reason, common sense, told her so. But it was in vain that she recalled these arguments; they had lost their meaning now. Reasons had become dull formula; words were as empty sounds. One idea prevailed in her mind—"I might have made him happy; for he loves me!"

Her thoughts wandered more and more. Her brain was hot and confused. She pushed back her bonnet, and let the cool breeze fan her temples. She threw off her shawl, for its weight oppressed her. In detaching it, she felt something hard against her bosom. A sudden recollection flashed across her mind, and she turned faint and dizzy.

His picture—and he had given it—must she restore it? She took it from its hiding-place, and gazed upon those fine features, till she fancied them change in expression, and glow with that deep feeling which had fired them, as he bent over her last night. "How handsome!" she involuntarily exclaimed, as she pressed the image to her lips; "but the original is far handsomer!—dear, dearest Charles!"

She started up. Did her senses deceive her?

Had her words wrought a miracle? Was he really there — Charles Stanly — he who loved her? Did his arms encircle her? Was it his heart that beat so wildly against her own? Could it really be? and that long, long rapturous kiss—or was the whole an illusion?

Isabella drew herself up to her full, queen-like height. She wished to check his impetuosity, to rebuke his presumption. But the words died upon her lips, as her eye fell upon the picture she still held in her hand, and she remembered the expressions she had but now uttered. Did she fear, did she hope that he had heard them? Weak and speechless, she fell back upon the seat, from which she had risen.

There was a long silence—but it spoke volumes. In silence, vows were exchanged. In silence, Charles told his love, and with a fervour such as language cannot render. There is poetry too sublime for words; there is religion too deep for prayer; there are times when silence is the highest eloquence.

At last he spoke in his soft musical whisper: “Again, and again; oh, say them again; those blissful words, that breathe rapture into

my soul. Oh, say them once again; dear, dearest Isabella!"

He sunk upon his knees at her feet, half in rapture at her gentleness, half in contrition at his own presumption. She laid her hand lightly upon his forehead, and looked tenderly, yet earnestly, into his face. That soft touch sent the blood rushing to his temples; but her deep, trustful gaze checked its wild impetuosity; then, in tones sweet as the music of the forest, but sad as the last breath of autumn through its withered foliage, she slowly spoke:

"You love me, then, Charles Stanly?"

"Do I love light, or air, or life? Can you doubt it, Isabella? What! tears? Why do you weep, my soul's own dearest? Why do you weep, my best beloved?"

He spoke soothingly, but not sorrowfully; for he saw that her tears were tears of joy.

"I am very foolish," she said, smiling through them. "Forgive me; but, in extreme happiness, there is always sadness."

"Sadness, Isabella? In happiness, sadness?"

"Yes; but a sadness which heightens and hallows it."

"Wonderful;" he proceeded, in a voice at

first tremulous with emotion, but which soon became enthusiastic and exulting—"wonderful; that I should have come just in time to hear these joyful words; passing wonderful. But there are moments when the powers above impel us towards happiness; when voices unheard, guide and direct us. For hours I have been wandering among the thickest woods. I felt that a fate was upon me. I climbed the mountain top; I plunged into the deep ravine. I stood beneath the waterfall, and the spray fell around me like bright sparks, forming rainbow upon rainbow of hope and promise. I yielded to the power which urged me onwards; I followed the torrent's track, till I reached the shore; high above me was the steep white cliff; I scaled it, and beheld joy, love, heaven—you!"

He was still upon his knees before her: he poured out words of rapture, eloquent when spoken, but which, if written, would appear trivial. There is a language which the heart only can interpret. His accents fell strange and new upon Isabella's ear; strange, yet familiar; new, yet long known. As in music, one cadence anticipates the next, and still

delights our expectation ; so she foretold the expressions which yet surprised her. She did not attempt to speak, for she saw that he understood her silence.

She let him rave on of happiness and of love. She listened to his protestations of affection. She loved his incoherent words. She smiled at his determination to toil night and day to deserve her, to work miracles in her name, to achieve impossibilities. He would show her, he said, of what he was capable ; he would surprise the world by his exertions, his perseverance, his success. Soon, very soon, he should be able to claim her as his own, and if a short space must first elapse, it would serve but to enhance their happiness.

Much more he said ; much more unsaid she well understood. She cared little for the words themselves, but his manner brought conviction with it.

He kissed her dress, her scarf, her glove, the stone on which her feet rested. His heart overflowed with love and sympathy. He would fain have shared his happiness with the whole world ; even his stern uncle he could have pardoned then.

They were as little children, happy, without a thought beyond. Charles rioted in the bright dreams of fancy, and Isabella shared his joy.

Where was now the strong will, the reason, of which she was wont to be so proud? A woman's love knows little of reason, or of will. When she loves; her individuality merges into that of another. Isabella was a true woman. Her happiness was in another's, her love in another's. She had a woman's heart, whose strength was its weakness, and she saw how well he loved her. She did not seek to curb his vehemence, she felt that even in his exaggeration there was reality. But had it been otherwise, perhaps, at that moment, she would have believed him.

He turned a wreath of wild ivy, and placed it upon her brow. "Oh!" he went on, with increasing excitement, "how beautiful you look! how noble, yet how yielding! How I wish you could see yourself as you are now. Oh, I could worship that glorious beauty, so gentle in its pride. Are you a being from another sphere, come to convert my world into a paradise? But none are so beautiful as you—so glorious! so majestic! Juno, Mi-

nerva, Diana ! oh no, for you outshine them all ; you are more beautiful, more dear, are you not Isabella ?—*my* Isabella ; the woman I love, the woman who *loves me* ?” he added, in his peculiar tone of unutterable tenderness.

Just then, a loud shriek was heard outside the arbour. Charles and Isabella rushed out, and perceived Lady Ramsay hanging, as it were, in mid-air, half-way down the precipitous cliff. The railing on its edge had been broken, part of it had fallen over, and was stopped from rolling to the bottom by a bush, into which it had got entangled. To this frail support Lady Ramsay was clinging, and screaming for help. It was evident that she must, somehow, have broken the railing and slipped down with it. Charles, not without considerable difficulty, contrived to scramble to her assistance, and brought her safely to the bottom.

During her danger, Lady Ramsay had behaved with tolerable presence of mind, but now it quite forsook her. She seized Charles’s hands, thanked him for saving her life, and then, in the same breath, called him cruel and

barbarous. Why did he preserve a worthless existence? she was miserable, and longed to die. She told him to go and leave her to her fate; then implored him, for God's sake, to stay, and not abandon her. In short, she contradicted herself every moment, and clearly did not know what she was saying. Presently she begun to cry violently, and, at last, went into hysterics.

Charles was frightened at her vehemence, and at a loss what to do. To his great relief, however, he perceived Frank, at no great distance, coming along the cliff.

“Quick, Frank, quick,” he called out to him; “your sister is ill—dying. For God's sake, hasten to her assistance. What is to be done? She faints again.”

But to Charles's great surprise, Frank showed no particular symptoms of alarm. He slowly descended the precipitous steps which led from the cliff to the beach, then walked leisurely to the sea, dipped his handkerchief in the water, and applied it to Lady Ramsay's temples.

“Leave Fanny to me,” he said, quietly. “She will soon be better. Come, Fanny,

check this nonsense. You can do so if you try," he said, rather sternly.

"How can you be so unkind," she exclaimed, in a voice louder than might have been expected from the state in which she appeared to be. "What do you mean? How can you suppose——?" She looked up, perceived Charles, and went off into another fit.

"Shall I run and fetch a doctor?" said Charles, getting more and more alarmed.

"No, no, we want no doctors. She will come round presently. Go and get the pony carriage down by the road to the beach; Fanny and Isabella can drive home in it, and you and I will walk."

Lady Ramsay objected to this plan. Between her sobs, which subsided with wonderful suddenness, she said, that she was too weak to drive herself, and too nervous to let herself be driven by Miss Romaine. She would rather walk. In a little while, with assistance, she would be quite able to do so. As she spoke, she looked at Charles, but, instead of taking the hint, and offering her his arm, he began running up the steep rocky steps with remarkable agility.

Lady Ramsay rose, and attempted to follow, but her flurry retarded her progress. Before she had ascended three steps, her feet slipped, she complained of giddiness, and was obliged to return to the beach, and rest a little longer.

She tried again ; and this time, with Frank's help, she reached the top. The grotto was empty.

“How odd not to wait for me !” she exclaimed, impatiently. She wanted to walk on directly, but Frank interposed :

“Rest a little here, while I go and fetch the carriage.”

By way of answer, Lady Ramsay set off walking, very fast, through the wood.

She looked anxiously about her, as she walked along ; but not at vista or prospect. The pony carriage was no longer at the farmer's, where it had been left—Charles must, therefore, have driven Isabella home.

“How odd of him to go without me !” she kept repeating, in an under tone.

“As Isabella is lame, and cannot walk, and you said you would neither drive nor be driven,

"I do not see what you have to complain of," said Frank, coolly.

Lady Ramsay did not answer; but, putting her arm impatiently through her brother's, made the best of her way home.

They parted at the door. Frank extended his walk. He sought, by bodily fatigue, to allay the disturbance of his mind. Those words of Isabella's haunted him, and yet he would not let himself dwell upon their true meaning. That Charles was in love with her was clear; but did she return his affection? no; he would not believe it. The idea was preposterous—the thing was impossible. But then her words! and, still more, her manner! Perhaps he had not heard the words rightly—or perhaps his extreme anxiety had lent them the intonation which gave them that fearful meaning. It was so unlike Isabella to act with such headlong precipitancy! He had known her all his life, and never seen her do a thoughtless or a wilful act. Her character, naturally decided, had been rendered more so by circumstances. From childhood, she had been compelled to judge

and decide for herself—she had always acted wisely, and she had thus learnt to rely, perhaps a little too proudly, upon her own judgment. Now this was all in Frank's favour. Truth and reason were on his side—if she listened to these, he must be the gainer. It was not likely that Isabella, so clear in her views, so just in her reasoning, so firm of purpose, should have suddenly become incautious and undecided. It was more than unlikely—it was impossible.

Yet the peculiar expression of Isabella's countenance was still present in Frank's mind. She was always before his eyes, with that look of agony—but might it not proceed from pity for Charles? Isabella was of a nature so tender, so sympathising, that she would naturally pity sufferings of which she had, however innocently, been the cause. It might be compassion, and nothing more. It must be so. Isabella was not the woman to care for a man so inferior to herself. Frank started, and stood still—a thousand instances occurred to his mind of superior women, who had loved unworthily. He could, indeed, at that moment, remember few instances of the

contrary. But he evaded the question, which he could not answer. He argued, that Isabella was not to be measured by the ordinary standard. Isabella was an exception to the general rule. Isabella was like no other woman. In fact, Frank was determined not to let his spirits be damped by anything short of absolute certainty. What was the use of dwelling upon painful doubts? He would take the first opportunity of speaking again to Isabella. At all events, he would not be precipitate.

We return to Lady Ramsay. It will be necessary to retrace our steps a little, in order to explain her sudden appearance, and strange conduct at the grotto.

If the preceding evening ended badly, the morning began worse. Lord Derwent's letter, and Charles's evasive answers to her questions respecting it, were ill-calculated to allay the storm which had, for some time, been gathering in her mind. She went to Sir James, as usual, after breakfast; but she did not remain with him long. She could not rest till she had "had it out, and made it up," with her boy.

Accordingly, she returned to the breakfast-

room ; but Charles had already left it. He was not to be found, either in the drawing-room, or in the library, nor yet in the boudoir. Disappointment increased her impatience, and she went to his room. No answer was returned to her knock, first gentle, then louder. At last, she opened the door. The room was empty. On the table lay the fatal sketch, of which Charles had, the evening before, possessed himself. Lady Ramsay perceiving it, cautiously shut the door, darted upon the hapless pasteboard, and crushed it to atoms between her hands. Then she unrolled it, and smiling at its disfigurement with a sort of malicious pleasure, tore it into shreds, and threw it into the fire.

But where could Charles Stanly be? A suspicion darted across her mind, and she ran hastily to Isabella's room. That room was also empty. She learnt that Isabella had gone out—with Charles, was her immediate conclusion.

Seizing the first bonnet and shawl she could find, Lady Ramsay set out, walking very fast, in the direction of the grotto, which was, as she knew, Isabella's favourite haunt. From

a distance, she recognised Charles's voice. She did not stay to hear his words; their tone of enthusiasm was, in her present ferment of mind, more than enough to impel her to almost any act of madness. Unconscious of her own purpose, she rushed impetuously forwards. The rail on the edge of the precipice was rotten, the ground slipped, and gave way. The rest has been told already.

It has also been seen, how Charles hastened back to Isabella. He hurried her away, that he might avoid Lady Ramsay's claims upon his attendance. He silenced Isabella's scruples, by a droll account of the hysterics, which seemed to come and go at pleasure; and Isabella having before witnessed in her, instances of the kind, she was easily persuaded—the more so as she wished to secure a quiet talk with Charles. During their drive home, they conversed, but it cannot be said that they did so quietly; he was too much excited; she too much moved. They begun a hundred subjects, and finished none. On one point, however, Isabella was explicit, and determined. She would not consent to their engagement being immediately made known;

she insisted upon waiting, till Charles had finally decided with regard to his future career. She foresaw, that Lady Ramsay's interference would be vexatious, and troublesome.

Charles felt that she was right; yet he yielded very reluctantly to argument, which he could not refute. He was so proud of her preference, that he would fain have proclaimed it to the whole world. He did not know how he should be able to keep so delightful a secret. He promised, however, that he would be discreet as regarded Lady Ramsay; but might no one be told?

Isabella replied, that Frank was the only person she wished, for the present, to admit into their confidence. His friendship deserved it; besides, as he was to assist Charles in his choice of a profession, it was necessary to apprise him of all the circumstances in which he was placed. Charles inwardly rejoiced at the idea of proving to Frank, that he was right in what he had said of Isabella's preference of him.

As soon as she reached home, Isabella sent for Frank, and told him, with great modesty, and considerable embarrassment, as much of

what had passed between herself and Charles, as was necessary to enable him to understand how matters stood.

Frank heard her in rigid silence. He was pale as death; even his lips blanched.

He then said, after a few moments' pause, "You are not yourself, Isabella Romaine!" The harsh hoarse tones, in which he spoke, made her start, and shudder.

"Frank!" she exclaimed, "what can you mean? Do not speak thus. I cannot bear to hear you speak thus. If I have acted foolishly, tell me so kindly, and pity me; but do not blame me for what is inevitable."

"Inevitable! no, death only is inevitable."

"Pardon me, what I say is true. I cannot retreat now—I do not wish it."

"Then, indeed, the case is different, and I am of no further use here." He moved, as if to go.

"Oh, Frank!" she exclaimed, sadly, and softly.

"Why should I stay to give advice, which must be unwelcome. I cannot speak what I do not think, and my thoughts are not such as would please you."

“Do not talk so harshly. You must know, that you are my best friend, and that your advice can never be displeasing, even though it come too late.”

“Never too late till a thing is done.”

“No, Frank, there are cases, when *said*, means more than *done*. There are words, which, once spoken, may never be recalled—believe me, unplighted vows are the most sacred. I have pronounced no oath, but I am bound by ties holier than law, or language can invent. The world will call my engagement imprudent. Be it so; upon myself, shall the responsibility fall. It may be my lot to drag through years and years of anxious waiting. I am prepared for it; but Charles, I am sure, will never give me cause to rue them.”

Frank shook his head. “I wish I could agree with you—God knows I wish it. But the truth is too plain; I ought not to disguise it from you, and I will not. I have known Charles Stanly from a boy, I know all his good qualities, and he has many, both of head, and of heart; but his character wants

stability. You must be aware that, without fixed principles, all the good impulses in the world are of little value. Charles has no fixed principles; he has always shown himself weak and vacillating. Do you expect him, of a sudden, to become metamorphosed? Do you imagine you can work this miracle? Highly as I appreciate your abilities, I doubt their power here. He cannot think of marrying at present, you know how slowly money is made, and do you really suppose, that he will remain constant—perhaps for many years? Remember how young he is, and in disposition he is even younger than his age—and you are older than he, Isabella.”

“ I know it well, I know it too well.” She spoke in an absent manner, as if her mind were following out some other train of ideas.

“ The anxieties of a long engagement will wear you out, Isabella; you have not a temperament to bear the torture of hope deferred. And, indeed, it would be very detrimental also to his prospects. To make his way well, a man should have but one aim in view—advancement. Complicated interests,

a double responsibility, would be fatal to Charles. This is only repeating the very arguments you used to me, but two hours ago.”

Isabella made no immediate answer. Her head rested thoughtfully upon her hand, and a deep shade of sorrow clouded her brow.

Presently she looked up. Tears stood in her eyes ; but a soft radiance beamed through them.

“ You may be right, Frank. I will believe you are. I will act accordingly. My security may be folly, weakness. Our engagement shall bring no evil upon *him*. It shall be binding on one side only. He shall never repent the day when he loved Isabella. I would not, if I could, be free ; but he shall remain unshackled. I will do more, I will leave him for a time. Absence shall test his affection. I will go, as I before proposed, to Italy, and remain there until his career in life is fixed. This plan is best for him, for both. Thus, our engagement will be no drag upon his prosperity, no bar to his happiness. Thank you, Frank, for acting as a friend, for speaking truth. I see you are right so far ; and you

will, I trust, find me right in the end. Charles Stanly, unfettered, will be most firmly bound.”

“Do not think it. Do not delude yourself. Try to reason dispassionately. Indeed—indeed, the case is clear. Isabella, it grieves me to say it, but Charles Stanly is not worth so noble a sacrifice. He is unable to appreciate its value. Let me beseech you not to throw away your happiness upon a man unworthy—in every way unworthy of you. Call forth your strength; give him up at once. Believe me, your rejection will not grieve him much—at least, not long.”

“No, you wrong him there. Whatever may be his defects, want of feeling is not among them. His faults are those of extreme youth. You are hard upon him. You are unjust. At his age, a man’s character cannot be formed; indeed, it should not be formed so early. At that age, too much firmness would be unamiable.”

Now, Frank’s character had been formed before he was twenty. At twenty he had laid down a plan for his future life, from which he never deviated. He had to struggle with the world, but he conquered nobly. Even at

twenty he was independent; and soon after, his name became honourably known. Frank had little vanity, but he could not help drawing a comparison between himself and Charles. It stung him to the quick, that Isabella did not do so. She seemed to have forgotten the early achievements she once praised so warmly. She did not do him common justice; and he had expected so much more. Were the hopes which he had entertained so long, which, especially within the last few days, had been wrought to their highest pitch, to be at once crushed? He did not pause to consider these questions, but all his feelings were wounded; and he said, with bitterness:

“The man who, at twenty, does not know his own mind, will be no wiser at thirty. It is madness to expect it.”

“Perhaps so, Frank,” she replied, gently, but very firmly. “My opinion of Charles may be too favourable, but, till I know the contrary, I will not change it. At all events, the risk is only mine, and I will undertake it. I care little for myself, so long as I bring no evil upon him.”

Frank was beside himself. His voice trem-

bled with conflicting emotions, and his manner was altogether unlike his own, as he exclaimed:

“Isabella, is it *you* I hear speak so madly? Isabella Romaine! I could never have believed it. I cannot believe it now. Yes, you are careful of *his* feelings, and you triumph wantonly upon mine. You sacrifice your friend, the friend of a whole lifetime, and for what—for a weak, vain fool, incapable of real affection. God knows what you see in that boy, to make you spurn the heart which has been yours since—I do not remember the time when I did not love you; you knew it, you must have known it, and to treat me thus!” She waved her hand to silence him, but he would not be stopped. He went on in broken sentences: “Let me speak out now. I must speak, I have been silent so long. The silence of a whole life may be broken once. The devotion of a whole life may be, at least, forgiven. Isabella, I have loved you as man never loved before. I have loved you—oh, God! how I *have* loved you!”

He covered his face with his hands. There was a deep silence. When he looked up, he started at the expression of Isabella's face.

She stood before him still, stately, cold, as a marble statue. Then she spoke with slow sternness :

“ This, then, is the reason of your strange conduct. I understand you now. Go ; you have acted unworthily. I was deceived in you ! ”

He uttered an inarticulate groan, and moved towards the door. Then he paused, and looked at her for a moment ; then, striking his forehead with his clenched fist, he left the room.

Isabella advanced a few hasty steps to detain him ; but, forgetful of her purpose, she stopped, musing. She stood rooted to the spot, her head bent forward, her eye fixed, as if gazing far into futurity. Presently she shivered, and looked round surprised, like one waking from a dream. She passed her hand across her forehead, to collect her thoughts. A sad smile like a pale sunbeam in a watery sky, gleamed through her tearful eyes, and a sigh, deep and low, as the last long vibration of a broken chord, burst from her. Then, casting up her eyes towards heaven, she faintly murmured the one word, “ Cassandra ! ”

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK, for the first time in his life, had lost his self-command. He had shown himself weak, and worse than weak, and in Isabella's presence. He had betrayed a secret, which, under the circumstances, no human power should have wrested from him. He was ashamed of his conduct; he despised himself.

Yet, was ever man so gallingly provoked? His feelings were wounded in the tenderest point; he had been stung to the quick—that *she* should accuse him so harshly—she, whose esteem he valued more than life!—she, for whom he had won the independence of which he was so justly proud, and which she had once appreciated even beyond its desert—and now, to treat him so unjustly, so unkindly—it was torture past endurance!

He felt that he must not trust himself again in Isabella's presence. He could not answer for what he might be induced to say, or do. Therefore, leaving a few hurried lines for his sister, stating that he was unexpectedly called to London, he took his hat, walked straight to the station, and set off by the first train.

Frank's sudden departure formed the subject of the conversation at dinner. There was nothing extraordinary in it; he was often called away at a moment's notice; yet it was discussed and commented upon, as if such a thing had never occurred before.

The fact was, that Lady Ramsay, for some reason or other, felt unequal to get up, and deal out the amusing anecdotes and the pretty nothings, in which she usually so much excelled. Yet, she dreaded lest the conversation should flag. Therefore, she talked about her brother, she praised his perseverance, she applauded his success. She felt on safe ground there; nobody would contradict her, nobody would speak ill of Frank. He was a general favourite.

She wore her sweetest smile, and spoke in

her softest voice ; but there was a look in her eye, an expression about her mouth, which, to an accurate observer, would have betrayed the angry feelings that were fermenting within.

But these ominous symptoms passed unnoticed. The others had enough to do, in endeavouring to conceal the state of their own minds. All were intently studying the parts they had to perform.

It must be confessed, that they all over-acted most glaringly, and Lady Ramsay most of all.

Charles was studiously inattentive to Isabella ; and fancied that no one would discover the cause of his extraordinary high spirits.

Arethusa acted the part of a beauty, for Mr. Preston's benefit. So overpowering were her airs and graces, that he at last began to think she must have some claim to what she assumed as so undoubted a right.

Mr. Preston did, and overdid, the artist. Arethusa accepted him as a genius. People are often taken at their own valuation !

The two old ladies, also, acted after their kind. Madame Rodostomus was all anima-

tion, Mrs. Tyrrell all languor. Laroche-fauld is right when he says, that we are more ridiculous by the follies we affect, than by those we possess.

Isabella assumed a calmness which she did not feel; even the truthful Isabella, for once, acted. And who does not? Who can tell how much of him is real, how much counterfeit? The child coaxes for its comfit, the man cringes for his inheritance. We perform for our own benefit, we act up or down to the audience; that is, the moral standard within us.

Chloe was born an actress. She was, so to speak, naturally affected. In her, coquetry was innate; and yet, notwithstanding all her art, she was not false. On the contrary, she often spoke her mind with bold daring. There never was so strange an anomaly as this child.

Mr. Preston had been busy all the morning taking a sketch of her. It had cost him no small time and trouble. During what was called her sitting, she had chattered, and laughed, and danced, as if she took a malicious pleasure in increasing the difficulty of the task. Yet, much as Mr. Preston was

provoked at her petulance, he could not be angry with her. There was something about her so captivating, it was absolutely magical.

Arethusa complacently handed about the sketch. Unfortunately for her, Aurora did not come that evening, so that she had nobody to whom she could confide her loud whispers for Mr. Preston's benefit. Thus she was fain to cast significant looks at Madame Rodostomus, telling her, in her audible under tone, that perhaps she might herself, in time, be prevailed upon to sit to Mr. Preston.

The sketch was really a pretty one. It represented little Chloe holding by the wing a canary bird, who was vainly struggling to be free. The child's expression was admirably rendered; it was full of fun and malice, but not cruel or malignant.

She was delighted with her picture, and in the wildest of spirits. She skipped about the room after Arethusa, imitating her attitudes and mimicking her words, to the no small displeasure of that young lady.

But Arethusa, wishing to appear amiable in Mr. Preston's sight, and having been really

put in very good humour by some compliments which he had addressed her, made a show of joining in the laugh; and, by way of a diversion, told Chloe to dance, or to sing something.

Chloe, nothing loath, struck up her Greek chant, and what she called her phyrrie dance. Arethusa thought this would be a good opportunity of engaging Mr. Preston in conversation, and showing off her learning. Accordingly, she begun talking a great deal of nonsense, and exhibiting a marvellous confusion of ideas about Greeks and Carthaginians, Romans and Trojans, who she evidently believed had lived and flourished at the same time, like the happy family, all in amity, and brotherly love.

Mr. Preston endeavoured, though with the utmost politeness, to prove, that her knowledge of history was not quite accurate, and that her notions of chronology were somewhat erroneous.

In the heat of discussion, it so happened, that he turned his back upon little Chloe, who, at that moment, was performing a difficult step, upon the execution of which she

especially prided herself. Provoked at his neglect, she stopped dancing, flew towards him, and by a sharp pinch in the arm, effectually cured his inattention.

“Serves you right,” she cried, with her ringing laugh. “I was doing my best step. Why don’t you look at it?”

“Oh, you abominable little tyrant!” exclaimed her mother. “What a darling it is!”

“An abominable darling,” echoed the child, mocking her. “That’s what mamma says I am.”

“Never was such a clever creature, to be sure! Such wit! such imagination!”

“I can’t think how people can reconcile it to themselves, to praise their own children! What an appearance it has to strangers! I never do such a thing!” rang Mrs. Tyrrell’s eternal chime.

“Don’t you really?” said Chloe, pertly.

“And even if she is clever now,” put in Arethusa, sharply, “that is no proof that she will be clever when she grows up. Clever children always turn out fools.”

“At that rate, what a wonderfully clever child *you* must have been!”

“It is too clever to live!” shrieked the widow, convulsed with laughter.

“Oh, what a great age you’ll live to,” said Chloe, with a portentous sigh.

Isabella thought it time to check this insolence. “Come here, Chloe!” she said. “I want to speak to you.”

“But I don’t want to be spoken to.”

“Come, just for one moment.”

“Say it out.”

“No, dear. I want to whisper something in your ear.”

“And I don’t want to be whispered to. It may be absurd, but I really can’t help it; it’s my way; other people may do as they please; I don’t object.”

The child had mimicked her mother’s voice and manner, so exactly, that it was almost impossible to resist laughter.

But Isabella became graver. “Do you hear me, Chloe?” she said, raising her voice.

“To hear is *not* to obey. I won’t be scolded.”

“I am not going to scold, but to reason with you.”

“And I won’t be reasoned with. I know

exactly what you are going to say. But if *she* don't mind my fun, why need you?" As she spoke, Chloe pointed contemptuously over her shoulder at her mother.

This was too much. Isabella rose, seized the child's hand, and said, very gravely: "Chloe, you must come up-stairs directly."

Chloe flew into a violent passion. "I won't, I won't!" she screamed. "I won't be treated like a baby. I shall be thirteen next birthday. I won't be sent to bed—I won't."

"Charles!" said Isabella, beckoning to him. "This must be put a stop to. Take her out of the room. I am not strong enough."

Charles was going to lead her forcibly away, but the child was too quick. She dived down, and sprang from him.

"Don't Isabella! pray don't!" she began, half-beseechingly, half-imperiously; but seeing that her sister remained firm, she went on, her manner getting more and more threatening. "You'd better not—mind, I warn you, you'd better not;" her pupils expanded like a tiger's, and looked green in

her rage. “Tell him not to touch me——You’d better——Tell him not to touch me, or I’ll——I’ve found out your secrets, I have——Don’t dare me, Isabella — you’d better not !”

But Isabella’s eyes told Charles to proceed, and he was preparing to obey, when Chloe, beside herself, sprang like a panther at her sister, and before Isabella could prevent her, thrust her hand into her bosom, pulled out the miniature, hurled it at Lady Ramsay’s feet, screaming, “They’ve deceived you—they’ve made a fool of you—he has given it her—it’s a pledge. There, Isabella !” she added, turning upon the latter—“there ! Now you’ll dare me again—you will, won’t you ?” and she darted out of the room.

A short pause ensued. All were thunder-struck. They had been taken so completely by surprise, the scene had passed with such rapidity, that they stood staring at one another in bewildered wonder. What has taken some time to relate, was over in a few moments.

The passion to which Lady Ramsay had yielded in the morning, now returned with

renewed force. All was clear now. To be deceived, to be made a fool of, and by him ! The thought was madness ! For a moment, she found in the very force of her rage, the power to control it. She felt that to yield to it, must kill her. During the short calm, thus forcibly induced, her inmost feelings were revealed to her, and she read her own mind by a vivid light ; but it was the fitful flash of a tropical storm. It passed, and all seemed darker than before.

Charles's excessive agitation, Isabella's calm self-command, increased Lady Ramsay's frenzy. The steady expression of Isabella's eye kept her, as it were, for some moments, at bay ; then her rage broke loose.

It is needless to repeat the violent expression she poured forth ; her state of passion made her hardly responsible for them. It was painful to see the distortion of her handsome features, to hear the unrestrained vibrations of her voice, as her passion grew more and more ungovernable.

In the midst of one of her most violent bursts, her arm suddenly dropped ; her words died upon her lips. In another moment, she

was upon her knees beside Sir James, who had been seized with a fit.

His feeble moans had been inaudible to all but her. Even in the height of her fury, her practised ear had caught the sound, which recalled her to herself.

She gave orders that Sir James should be carried to bed, and that medical advice should instantly be summoned.

The seizure was of a more violent nature than any Lady Ramsay had yet witnessed. The village doctor, who was in the habit of attending Sir James, was greatly alarmed, and wished for more advice. Accordingly, telegraphic despatches were forthwith sent to London.

Sir James lay, for many hours, apparently insensible, except at intervals, when he uttered piteous lamentations; then the convulsions returned more violently than before.

It seemed as if Lady Ramsay's hand alone possessed the power of soothing him. He repelled the assistance of the doctor or the servants. Even in his most violent paroxysms, he distinguished her touch from that of any other. Occasionally, he would fix his eyes

upon her, with a strange, uneasy sort of meaning.

Lady Ramsay bent over him in intense anxiety. Not a change in his condition escaped her. Her colour went and came as he appeared to suffer more or less ! With her own hands, she performed those offices necessary for his relief. She had never, perhaps, felt so much pleasure in assisting him : but she avoided his eye ; there was something in its expression which she dared not meet.

The doctor had prescribed various remedies, which had all been tried without effect. It was clear that he could suggest nothing more. The night was already far advanced—the physicians who had been summoned from London would probably arrive early in the morning. Lady Ramsay saw that nothing more could be done till then ; she, therefore, sent the servants to bed, and persuaded the doctor to lie down in an adjoining room ; she insisted upon watching by her husband's side.

The convulsions seemed over, and Sir James fell into a state of stupor ; still as a corpse, but without the soft repose of death.

It was a weary watch. Hour after hour

dragged miserably on, as Lady Ramsay sat listening to her husband's heavy breathings. If she moved, his frame quivered, and his eyes opened with their meaning stare. He evinced no other sign of consciousness.

A superstitious dread stole over her. Frightful phantoms crowded into her mind. She heard unearthly sounds—strange footfalls, pacing to and fro. The intervals between the half-hour chimes of the clock seemed interminable. Would the morning never come?

At last, a chilly shiver, and a faint ray, struggling through the closed shutters, announced the approach of dawn. Just then, the sound of carriage-wheels became audible. Was it the physicians from London? But no, they could not arrive so soon. What could bring a carriage to the castle, at so early an hour?

With a vague presentiment of evil, she stole to the window, opened it, and looked out into the cold, raw morning. The air was misty—leaden clouds hung, like a pall, over the world. The aspect of nature was sad and dreary, and a faint, pink streak, just visible

in the horizon, served, by contrast, to increase the surrounding gloom.

The sounds approached. A carriage drew leisurely into the back court. Of this, the window, at which Lady Ramsay was stationed, commanded a full view. The coachman slowly got off his box, patted and coaxed his horses, blew upon his hands to warm them, and then swung his arms back and forwards. It was evident, that there was nobody in the carriage; it must, therefore, have been sent for to convey some one from the castle. But whom, then, was the point.

She continued gazing at the empty carriage; as if, by so doing, she could unravel the mystery of its appearance. Heedless of the chilly morning air, she remained at the open window. Her hair, saturated with moisture, hung in clammy coils about her face; she let it fall as it list, over her forehead and cheeks.

The house-door opened softly, and she quickly withdrew behind the window-curtain. "How foolish to expose myself to the raw damp air!" she muttered, half aloud, as she wrapped the curtain tight round her.

She stood so, that herself unseen, she could

distinguish all that was going on below. A figure had issued from the house, and she watched its movements anxiously. It got into the carriage, rearranged its cushions, and spread in one corner a cloak, in readiness for its future occupant. Then, having exchanged a few whispered words with the coachman, the figure returned to the house.

As if fascinated, Lady Ramsay's eyes were riveted upon the cloak. It was Isabella's cloak, and Charles Stanly it was who had taken such pains to place it conveniently.

Presently, boxes and parcels were brought down, and every now and then, Charles came to superintend the packing of the carriage. He was never satisfied with the arrangements inside. He altered and altered again. Nothing was to encumber the corner where the cloak was spread, the corner where *she* was to sit.

It was evident that Madame Rodostomus and her daughter, offended by Lady Ramsay's conduct, were going away. On the whole, she thought it best they should go, without another meeting. An explanation would be painful. It was much better avoided.

But whose was that trunk, just brought down? Could it be Charles Stanly's? Oh no; impossible. It was like one of his trunks, but two trunks might surely be alike.

A noise at the front door disturbed Lady Ramsay in her conjectures. She closed the window, and returned to her seat by the bed. Presently the physicians, just arrived from London, entered the room.

Long and learned was the medical consultation. The patient was in a state of great exhaustion. The exhaustion resulted from the previous convulsions. The exhaustion must be conquered, or the patient could not rally. So far both parties were agreed.

But how to effect this purpose? "By stimulants," opined the elder gentleman. "By palliatives," insisted the younger. "Brandy," said the first; "pour in brandy, or he will die." "Lemonade," contended the second; "nothing but lemonade, or you will kill him." The country practitioner assented to each, in turn. The London authorities could not decorously draw lots, so they determined to suspend the conference until the arrival of

a third physician, who was to come by the next train; meanwhile, they prescribed quiet for the patient, and breakfast for themselves.

To breakfast accordingly they went, and Lady Ramsay returned to the window. The carriage was now entirely packed; and a man's hat-box among the baggage, told a painful truth: Charles must be going, and going with *her*. How bitterly Lady Ramsay repented her past conduct! What a fool she had been! What a sad, sad fool!

The medical umpire now arrived, and Lady Ramsay's self-upbraidings were suspended. The three London physicians, and the country practitioner, nodded sapiently round the bed. All eyes were fixed upon the great man last arrived. "Nature," spoke the oracle, "must have her course. Follow this treatment, and Sir James will recover—or he will not." The two other gentlemen looked perplexed, but impressed, by so new and startling a view of the case. The sage oracle stayed just ten minutes in the castle, and received an enormous fee.

During the consultation, the mysterious car-

riage had driven away, and Lady Ramsay resumed her post of watching by her husband's pillow. She tried to think only of him ; but the carriage floated in her mind, like the spectral ship in the story. She wondered who were its occupants, tried not to wonder, and wondered why she tried. "How can I think of anything but poor Sir James !" she said to herself. "How ill he looks ; sinking—oh, sinking fast. Yes, *he* loved me—he really loved me ; he was not ungrateful ; he would not have wantonly thwarted my wishes. Poor Sir James ! how kindly he used to say, 'Fanny !' Shall I never again hear him call me 'Fanny !' "

"Dear ! how is he ? how is he ?" spoke a hoarse whisper ; and, turning round, Lady Ramsay recognised Aurora's broad face peering in at the door. "I only just heard of it, on my way to church, so I came off directly to see if I could be of any use. It will be so kind your making me of any use, Lady Ramsay."

Good little Aurora was so anxious not to disturb the invalid, that she did not stumble

over one footstool, and knocked her bonnet out of shape only twice, on her progress from the door to the bed.

“He *is* better now ; I’m sure he *is* better, dear Lady Ramsay,” croaked little Aurora, in her consolatory way.

Lady Ramsay shook her head, mournfully. “Oh no, no,” she replied ; “he is getting weaker—gradually sinking.”

“Dear, dear ! But no, I think really, that he’ll soon be better.”

“I fear not, Aurora. He does not even know me now.”

Just then the sick man’s eyes opened wide. There was an anxious tenderness in their expression, inexpressibly touching. The pale lips moved, but without sound. It was plain that he wished to say something kind to his wife, but had not strength to do it. Lady Ramsay, overcome, burst into tears.

“Don’t !” said Aurora, “oh, dear Lady Ramsay, don’t cry, pray don’t.—She is crying for joy, Sir James, I am sure she is, because you are better.” But he moved his head back and forward upon the pillow, as if in denial of this assurance. “But you *are* better,”

she persisted; "the doctors say so, and the doctors ought to be right; and people do get better sometimes, you know."

These ingenious arguments, however, had not the desired effect. Sir James still moved his head incredulously, and Lady Ramsay, unable to suppress her increasing emotion, rushed, sobbing, out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

FRANK TYRRELL arrived in London with a heavy heart. But two days before, he had left it, full of joy and hope. And these hopes were not vague or unfounded; he felt proudly and justly, that he had every right to expect their realisation. When he set out for Eastrow, he had looked forward to a joyful return home. He had pictured to himself what would be his feelings when he should next enter his house. It was with a sort of holy awe that he had visited every room, and recalled the dreams of which each were suggestive. For there was not a spot where he had not thought of her, and he almost trembled at the idea, that the temple even now hallowed by an image of the imagination, might, ere long, be consecrated by the reality of her presence.

Different, indeed, were his feelings to what

they had been that day ; still more different to those he had so fondly anticipated. As he drove along the streets, he was reminded of the thoughts which had occupied his mind when he last passed through them. The objects which were then familiar, now appeared strange. It was as if a change had come over the town, and all within it. And he sighed, when he reflected, that the change was in the colouring of his own mind.

He dreaded to enter his study. He dreaded to view the neatness and order which would meet him there. His heart sickened at the thought of his books, his papers, his memoranda, all ranged in their respective places, ready for immediate use. He loathed the outward symmetry, contrasting so painfully with the confusion within ; and he lingered some moments in the street before he had courage to knock at his own door.

He entered hastily, and, hardly speaking to the servant, hurried up-stairs. He threw himself into a chair, and tried to reflect, but, as yet, reflection was impossible. One thought filled his brain—he had lost *her* for ever.

Recollections of the past crowded thick

into his mind—recollections once sweet, now bitter, oh how bitter ! . Isabella's image pervaded each, but under very different aspects. He saw her kind and confiding, prominent in every scene of his childhood and of his youth ; as she had charmed his boyish exertions, as she had cheered his manly labours. He saw her as the bright star, whose steady light had guided him through sorrow and disappointment—he saw her a rainbow of peace and of promise.

And then the reverse !—that look of cold disdain—that tone which chilled him to the heart. “ You have acted unworthily—I was deceived in you ! ” rang in his ears again and again. Yet, even now, he could hardly believe that it was she, even she, who had spoken such words.

But it was too true. He had lost her for ever—how could he bear to live ? He shuddered when this question presented itself to his mind. Was he, then, so weak, so contemptible, as to shrink from the lot which was cast for him ? It must be borne, why not bear it manfully ?

“ After all,” he reflected, “ are we not the

authors of our own misfortunes? Does not the fault induce its fitting punishment? and, in his own case, had not his folly caused his anguish? Why had he not told his love before? Why had he told it then? He might have known that *that* was no time to speak. He had let passion outweigh his reason, and, by a sort of mad bravado, wrest his secret from him. Yes, he had acted weakly, and worse than weakly, and he deserved his fate.” He walked rapidly up and down the room, in intense agony of mind. Years afterwards, the recollection of that half hour would send the colour from his cheek.

Again and again he asked himself these questions: “Did he really deserve his fate? Had he really lost her esteem? And yet”—he stopped, as a new thought struck him—“is it, indeed, as I once imagined, of such priceless value? Is she the superior being I was wont to think her? Has Isabella not by an unworthy love, proved herself unworthy?” He resumed his walk, but more slowly than before. “Has she not, like a green school-girl, fallen in love at first sight, attracted by what?—a handsome person and

pleasing manners, but no more. She must know it, she must feel that Charles Stanly is weak and vain, that he possesses no superiority either of head or of heart. That she should have selected him!—that she, Isabella Romaine, should sink so low! who could believe it?" Frank's pace increased with the agitating feelings these thoughts produced.

In these, however, he found, for a time, a sort of desperate consolation. He could surely never be so mad as to regret a woman who had shown herself so ill-deserving of his affection, who had used him so unjustly, so unkindly! Her conduct was altogether unworthy; he would despise her for it.

But these ideas soon faded away; their fallacy was too apparent. Frank knew full well that love, first love especially, is the offspring of imagination, the dawn which may be mistaken for day, the deceptive glow of Aurora, which soon vanishes before the full, fervid blaze of sunshine. He knew that natures the most gifted are, perhaps, most liable to such delusions, for in them imagination is most brilliant and most powerful. They are too apt to love, not the object they see, but

its image reflected upon their mind, which they adorn with the deceptive splendour of a prism-like fancy. They create the idol, and then worship it; they confound the real with the ideal, the dream with reality.

A new train of thought was roused. Frank sat down, and endeavoured to carry it out calmly. He put these questions to himself: "Can I, loving Isabella as I do, judge her conduct impartially? Can I be just towards Charles? Does not jealousy blind me? Had the choice fallen upon a worthier object, what would my feelings have been then?"

He remained for some time lost in thought. Presently, a sigh of relief escaped him, and his brow cleared. "Thank God," he said, within himself. "I may have been hasty, but I am not mean, or selfish. If Charles had been deserving of her, I should have regretted her as deeply, no doubt, but less sorrowfully. To secure her happiness, I could have given her up; I could do anything for her good. It is not as a rival only, that I object to Stanly, but as a man, who is incapable of appreciating the treasure he has won. That Isabella should have thrown herself away so

completely! that she should have blighted all her prospects of happiness! Oh, it is a dreadful—a maddening thought!”

But now that Frank was more satisfied with himself, he became more lenient towards Isabella. He excused her misplaced affection, and forgave it. He never thought of forgiving her unkind treatment of himself; *that* was already forgotten.

“It is a sad pity,” thus he reflected, “that she has made this choice; but regrets are vain. What is done, cannot be undone; but though there is no remedy, there may be a palliative. Come what may, Isabella shall not lose her friend. I will stand by her, in good, and in ill fortune. I will avert what evils I can. If I may not protect, I may, at least, console her. And consolation, I fear, she will need, sooner or later. God forgive me, if I wrong Stanly; but I cannot help thinking——no matter. It is folly to speculate as to what may happen; let *hereafter* take care of itself; my business is with *present*. I must cultivate Stanly’s friendship. I must try to improve his amiable qualities; and let me do him justice, he *has* amiable qualities.

He has good impulses—they must be confirmed; he is not wanting in abilities—they must be brought out. What I can, I will do, and I hope I may do something. All may yet be well. God grant it. No doubt, his attachment to Isabella proves, that he is capable of admiring excellence, and appreciating it—to a certain extent, at least. What should be done first, is to get him some employment. His fancy is for diplomacy; well, he may be right; a man is the best judge of his own capabilities, and instinct sometimes directs well, where reason fails.”

Frank mused for some time, and then put paper before him. He wrote a note, with which he evidently took much pains. It was to Lord Derwent, and its purport was to request an interview of the all-powerful minister.

We return to Isabella. On the whole, her journey was prosperous. For a wonder, the old lady had been exceedingly easy to manage. She had been so frightened by Sir James's fit and Lady Ramsay's passion, that for once, she made no objection to what she was told was necessary. The moment Isabella mentioned

it, she agreed to leave Eastrow ; and so anxious was she to be off, that she begun preparing for departure, not very long after the time at which it had been proposed to start. What was still more remarkable, she had not many visions of forgotten articles ; and the party had only to stop twice between the castle and the station. The first time was at the lodge-gate, in order to send back for a prayer-book—the very last present of poor dear Romaine—which, she at length recollected, she had herself carefully packed in her carpet-bag ; the second time was to search for a ring—the very first present of poor dear Rodostomus—and which was happily discovered snug on the third finger of her own left hand. It may be supposed, that circumstances so extraordinary, were suggestive of others, even more marvellous, which had occurred at different periods of her eventful life, for which she had never been able to account, and upon which she commented and speculated with her usual dolorous cheerfulness. At last they reached the station, just in time to catch distant sounds of the engine, which should have taken them to London ; so that they

had only two hours to wait for the next train ; —a curious circumstance, as the widow mysteriously observed, but, after all, only just like her luck.

However, if Madame Rodostomus had been unusually easy to deal with, little Chloe had been very much the reverse. The violence of her despair, when she discovered the consequences attendant upon her betrayal of her sister's secret, was terrible. Her penitence was far more troublesome than her petulance. She threw herself at Isabella feet, sobbing as if her heart would break, upbraiding herself in the most vehement manner, and refusing every sort of consolation. Even her mother's scolding failed to rouse her spirit. She let the old lady talk on, without once contradicting her. She shook Charles off, when he attempted to caress and soothe her. She clung passionately to her sister, imploring pardon, which Isabella granted over and over again ; but even this, for many hours, was insufficient to pacify her.

Isabella was nearly worn out with fatigue and annoyance. But for Charles's kindness and consideration, her spirits must have en-

tirely failed her. He, good humouredly, took Madame Rodostomus off her hands, patiently listened to her endless remarkable anecdotes during the drive, and established her comfortably with cloaks and cushions on the sofa of the station-house.

While she was chattering and chiruping away on the eternal subject of her remarkable fate and stupendous misfortunes, Isabella stood musing at the window. The bells were ringing for early service, and the country people, in their Sunday dresses, were gathering for their simple devotions.

The window, at which Isabella stood, commanded an extensive prospect. A vast plain, still wrapped in morning mist, lay spread before her. To the right, upon an eminence, stood the rustic church, green with venerable ivy. Presently, the merry chime ceased, and the heavy toll began. Somehow, it associated itself in Isabella's mind, with Frank Tyrrell's last words. They rang in her ear like an ominous knell.

Had he spoken sooth? Was he right in his opinion of Charles Stanly? Was Charles really weak, and vain, and fickle? Was her

affection indeed misplaced? Had she made a foolish, thankless sacrifice?

While she was thinking over these things, Charles approached her, and took her hand. Her head was averted—she could not see the expression of his face—but she heard his sigh of rapture, as he said, in his low melodious whisper:

“Thank you, dearest—ten thousand thanks—you have made me the happiest of men.”

At that moment the bell ceased. The deep bass of the organ swelled the air. The mist rose, and rolled backwards like a vast sea, and the sun broke through his shroud of vapour. Darkness was upon the valley, but the church-spire shone, like burnished gold, against the lowering sky.

Isabella's heart was too full for words, but she fixed her earnest look upon Charles, and returned the pressure of his hand.

Her doubts were all forgotten. His very faults were dear to her, for they were *his* faults.

Yet all this affection did not blind her to the probable evils of the fate which awaited her. Hers was that rare attachment, deep,

true, yet clear-sighted. They stood together watching the valley, beautifully undulating in shadow and in light. Some spots were brightest, then darkest, then these again trembled into fitful brilliancy. At one moment, all was light—at another, the whole extent of the valley was wrapped in gloomy shadow.

“ See,” said Isabella, “ does not that prospect remind you of life, with its changes, and its chances ? Brightness succeeds gloom, and gloom, brightness. How little we know what the next moment may bring forth.”

“ I can see nothing but you, Isabella—I can think of you only when you are by.”

Nothing could exceed the kindness and attention shown by Charles, during the journey. His patience with Madame Rodostomus was little short of marvellous. He seemed intuitively to know the exact amount of contradiction she required, to keep her in good humour. She chattered almost incessantly all the way, while he seemed to listen ; and she arrived in London, enchanted with the variety and extent of Mr. Stanly’s conversational powers.

Yet he also found time to attend to Isabella. He saw that she was languid and

weary, and he exerted himself, to the utmost, to cheer and amuse her. She did her best to conceal the depression which she could not entirely conquer. Charles ascribed it, chiefly, to bodily fatigue. He had no doubts as to her sentiments towards him, and this conviction elated him so much, that he could hardly think of anything else.

Soon after their arrival in London, Charles received a note from Frank, desiring to speak with him upon business. About an hour afterwards he returned, with a countenance full of joyful importance.

“ I will not decide upon anything, till I have consulted you, dear Isabella,” he began ; “ but I am greatly inclined to accept an offer I have just received from Lord Derwent.”

“ From Lord Derwent !” exclaimed Isabella, surprised and alarmed, for she dreaded a return of his old partiality for the army.

“ Yes, I have just been to Lord Derwent’s ; I am delighted with him, and I flatter myself that the partiality is mutual.”

“ But I did not know that you were acquainted with Lord Derwent.”

“ Nor was I till this morning ; Tyrrell took me there, and introduced me.”

“ Frank Tyrrell ! ” she exclaimed, in surprise.

“ He is the best-hearted fellow in the world, is Frank. You would say so, if you heard the handsome way in which he spoke of me just now. By Jove ! I felt myself blushing, like a young lady, at the grand character he gave me.”

And Charles proceeded to relate what had taken place, first between himself and Frank, then between these two, and Lord Derwent. The latter had offered to get him appointed attaché to the embassy at St. Petersburg. The only drawback to this plan was, the separation from Isabella ; but there was no alternative. All the other embassies were filled up.

Tears stood in Isabella’s eyes, as she listened to Charles’s recital. They were tears partly of gratitude for Frank’s touching kindness, partly of contrition for her own unjust behaviour towards him. Charles ascribed them solely to the impending separation from himself, and offered to throw up the situation, if she so wished it.

“ Forgive me, dear Charles,” said Isabella, wiping the tears which she could no longer

restrain. “Forgive my weakness. But with me, you know all deep feelings, whether of joy or of pain, move me to tears.” Then, forcing a smile, she added: “I feel happiness sorrowfully; but I am indeed happy to hear of this appointment. It is exactly what I should have wished.”

She then told him what she had not had courage to tell before, that she had herself determined upon going to Italy for the ensuing winter. Under any circumstances, it would be necessary to return there; if only to make arrangements for finally leaving it. “This separation will be a test to our affection,” she said, and tried to smile, but her lip quivered, and her voice faltered so, that she could not add, as she intended—“and the test will prove its strength and durability.”

Charles, though grieved to part from Isabella, was, however, too much elated by his new prospects for anything to damp his spirits. He went on building up castles for the future; and, at last, his hopes imparted themselves, in some measure, to her. Still she would not encourage too visionary aspirations. She told him simple truth. She strove to fire his enthusiasm, without exciting his vanity. Isabella

possessed over Charles that resistless sway, which powerful minds hold over those which are weaker. While with her, her strength infused itself to him, he felt imbued with a firmness of purpose, a clearness of perception, at other times foreign to his nature. He shared her enthusiasm, her lofty views ; she did not persuade, but convince. Till he saw her, he had made love ; but never loved in the high and true sense of the word. Isabella first revealed to him the sanctity of a feeling, either the noblest or the vilest, of which our nature is capable. Isabella exalted love into religion. Her love, like incense, wreathed upwards toward heaven. With her, it was not a passion, but a revelation.

She wrote to Frank in terms of the most heartfelt gratitude. She did not allude to their past misunderstanding ; she only spoke of her present thankfulness. She told him that she considered his friendship as the greatest blessing which Providence had bestowed upon her ; as the only one human affection which could never change.

Frank's answer was, like himself ; just what Isabella expected of him — simple, honest, manly. He said little, but she saw that he

meant much ; he promised nothing, but she knew that he would perform to the utmost of his power.

As Isabella's departure was so soon to take place, Frank thought it best to avoid a personal leave-taking, which would only give unnecessary pain to both. He would, therefore, he said in his letter, not see Isabella before she left England, unless, indeed, she had anything to communicate which might not be committed to paper. Isabella understood and appreciated the delicacy of his motives.

It was a long time before Madame Rodostomus could be brought clearly to comprehend that Isabella was engaged to be married, and that she herself was going to Italy. The old lady was glad, and sorry, and enchanted, and in despair, all at the same time. It was wonderful, marvellous, quite unaccountable, as, indeed, she had always observed, most things in this world certainly were. " But, bless me ! " she exclaimed, " doesn't Romaine begin with an ' R,' and doesn't Rodostomus begin with an ' R,' and doesn't Stanly begin with an ' S,' and isn't that the very next letter in the alphabet ? Well, to be sure, was

ever anything half so extraordinary? The more I think of it, the more I see how inscrutable are the ways of Providence; and, though it may be absurd, I really can't help it, I cannot help crying for joy; for certainly, if Mr. Stanly were only richer, or greater, or older, or something, in short, different to what he is, he would have been just the very identical man whom I should have picked out of the whole world for my Isabella, who is certainly handsome enough to grace any throne, which I'm afraid Mr. Stanly will never sit upon; but, after all, it's only my luck."

Having delivered herself of these clear and consolatory observations, the widow threw herself into Charles's arms, and sobbed for full ten minutes upon his shoulder. Presently she wiped her eyes, put on her spectacles, and then, as if the idea had just occurred to her, declared that she had never seen any one so handsome before, and that she loved him better than any living soul, excepting, of course, her children and her poor, dear, departed husbands.

The last sad day arrived. Isabella and Charles exchanged rings. As he drew his upon her finger, he felt her hand cold, and

passive. He sought in vain to soothe and cheer her; but he was almost frightened at the preternatural and strained composure of her expression.

“Dearest Isabella!” he said, “remember that this sad present points to a happy future. Look forward to our next meeting, love!”

“Oh, Charles,” she replied, with a tone which she vainly endeavoured to render calm, “do you think we shall ever really meet again?”

“Isabella!” he exclaimed, in alarm. “My own Isabella!”

“And if we meet—will it be as now?”

“Can you doubt it? Can you think so ill of me?”

“Oh, no, no; not that, but God knows! time—absence!”

“Do not think it for a moment. I will not—cannot change. I love you, and you alone. If you think me unworthy of your love——”

“Charles!” she said, with a sad kind of exaltation—“Charles, do you know what love is? It is that which increases day by day and hour by hour. It is the reflection of heaven within us.”

She spoke with that lofty enthusiasm which had always a powerful effect upon Charles, and it was with fervour equal to her own that he exclaimed :

“Hear me swear, Isabella !”

“Hush !” she interrupted, softly ; “oh, hush ! do not swear. Vows may be broken, promises recalled. Oh, do not swear. Unplighted troth is the most holy, silent oaths are the most binding.”

The carriage was announced, and Isabella rose to go. Charles seized her in a last embrace.

“How strong you are ! You do not tremble ; but how cold you feel—how pale you look !” he added, anxiously.

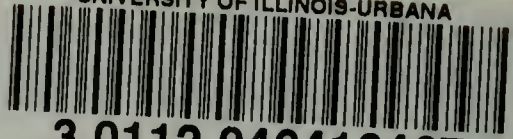
“God bless you,” she faltered, “and God help me !”

She tore herself from his arms, hurried into the carriage, and was gone.

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